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REALISM IN THE NEW IRISH DRAMA

BY

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
SUPERVISION BY Avis Dungan Carlson

ENTITLED Realism in the New Irish Drama

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THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I.

THE DECLINE OF IRISH NATIONALIST DRAMA

In any attempt to survey modern Irish drama the first name to be considered is that of the writer who is most deeply related to and indeed responsible for the sudden dramatic up-bursting which began obscurely enough in the opening of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, but for the next fifteen years was probably the phenomenon most talked of in the world of letters. For all time the name of W. B. Yeats is associated with Irish drama of the last twenty-five years; his brain conceived both the artistic creed which underlies the national school of drama and the practical means of carrying it out; his enthusiasm and faith kindled the enthusiasm of those he found to help him until the work of the group took on the character of a "movement"; even the younger playwrights with whom this study is primarily concerned, although not in a large sense disciples of Yeats, owe their dramatic impetus to him and to the national drama which he fostered. Without the standards of the Abbey theatre and the atmosphere of dramatic activity which pervaded Ireland in, say, 1906 the young writers, Ervine, Mayne, Robinson, Murray, Colum and Boyle, would hardly have set themselves at the most difficult of literary forms.

It is necessary, then, in studying the new Irish drama to begin with a brief account of the National drama, its rise, principal figures, and artistic principles, but chiefly the underlying causes of its decline--causes which might explain its rejection by the young men who were just beginning to learn their art when the national drama was at its height.

George Moore has said, "All the Irish movement rose out of Yeats and returns to Yeats."¹ The irritating obscurity of the last half of the statement does not prevent assent to the first half, for the fact remains that had not Yeats played the beneficent tyrant of art as he sees art, there would have been no great school of modern Irish drama. He gave it its impress, defined its bounds, reformed its theatre and in a large measure invented its famous technique of acting, interested in it the two writers who besides himself make up the school, and fought its battles as a propagandist. To realize how thoroughly it springs from the artistic ideals of Yeats one has to go back to the very beginnings of the movement.

When in 1899 he with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and George Moore founded the tiny Irish Literary Theatre, time was not long in showing his differences from two of his co-workers in opinion as to what the new theatre was to be and do. Moore and Martyn had learned in London and on the continent

1. Salve, p. 206.

a taste for Ibsen and the "drama of ideas". Martyn, especially, stood for a theatre like The Independent Theatre which should develop a drama only different from the continental and English drama tracing its ancestry to Ibsen, as it would differ springing from "an idealism founded upon the ancient genius of the land."¹ He himself was more familiar with and therefore more interested in landlord and middle classes than in the peasants in whose life and speech Yeats was discovering a source for Irish art. For these reasons Martyn argued in the United Irishman that Irish actors should be trained to present the drama of society. His own plays show the Norwegian influence, although E. A. Boyd in Contemporary Drama of Ireland insists that it was an Ibsenism more colored by the personality of Martyn than was Shaw's. "Instead of merely seizing upon the facilities for propaganda afforded by the worn-out conventions, he applied Ibsen's method to the portrayal of national character and interpretation of Irish life."²

Yeats, however, as every student of modern drama knows, conceived of the function and materials of the new drama very differently. "Our movement is a return to the people, and the drama of society would but magnify a condition of life which the countryman and the artisan could but copy

1. Beltaine, February 1900.

2. Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 18.

to their hurt. The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure should either tell them of their own life, or of that life where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions-- If we busy ourselves with poetry and the countryman, two things which have ever mixed with one another in life as on the stage, we may recover in the course of years a lost art."¹ This insistence that in the life of the peasant and his folk lore is to be found poetry is the great distinguishing mark of the national school of drama which Yeats founded. At the end of the three tentative years planned for the Irish Literary Theatre Martyn dropped out of the movement as Moore had already done. Yeats's influence was now dominant.

Nevertheless, the tendency of the new school was almost at once to move away from the poetic drama in which Yeats was primarily interested and to stress more and more the peasant. The reason for this change is not far to seek: Yeats is essentially a poet, not a dramatist, whereas Synge is essentially a dramatist with a high degree of lyric impulse. The heart of Yeats's artistic creed is in his statement: "All the great masters have understood that there cannot be great art without the little limited art of the fable--and the rich, far-wandering, many-imaged life of the half-seen

1. Samhain, 1902; Collected Works of Yeats, Vol. IV., p. 103.

world beyond it."¹ The same idea is in the words of Forgael:

"All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to the dream
And get into their world that to the sense
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
Among substantial things; for it is dreams
That lead us to the flowing, changing world
That the heart longs for."²

Such a temperament could hardly have any close contact with or sympathy for human life in the rough, the one thing which good drama must have. The result is, says Forrest Reid, "we hardly ever get from Mr. Yeats' plays a pleasure that comes through our emotional sympathy. We never really care enough about Naisi and Deirdre to care what becomes of them. We are moved by the beauty of the imagery, the beauty of the verse, but that emotion of pity which such a story as theirs should arouse is left untouched."³ In the same way Weygandt characterizes the dramas of Yeats as "a development of epic and lyric poetry illustrated by tableaux against background out of faery."⁴ Such a form of literature going back in its sources to old legends, folk-tales, books of mysticism

1. Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 341.

2. Shadowy Waters.

3. Forrest Reid: W. B. Yeats, p. 180.

4. Weygandt: Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 45.

and magic, faery-like landscape, the poems of Spenser, Blake, Shelley and William Morris, and to the old English morality, the effects of Greek tragedy and Maeterlinck's static drama, could never result in a close feeling for human life of to-day, even in a country as close to primitive races as Ireland is. Yeats himself admitted in one of the earlier issues of Samhain the possibility that "we may have to deal with passing issues until we have re-created the imaginative tradition of Ireland and filled the popular imagination again with saints and heroes."¹ If he, who of the early group of Irish writers was the one most thoroughly imbued with the artistic principle of art for truth and beauty's sake; who unfalteringly fought to keep his drama entirely apart from service to any cause; who rejected entirely the drama of ideas as pallid and unfitted for the theatre which should be a place for intellectual excitement--if he could admit the possibility of "having to deal with passing issues" even temporarily, it is no wonder that friends, even those most immediate, developed away from his artistic theories. What happened to Yeats himself as he carried them to their logical development will be shown later.

Of his literary associates in the movement, Lady Gregory is easily the closest, the one with whom there was most of mutual influence. Their common interest in old folk

1. Yeats: Collected Works, Vol. IV., p. 87.

lore was fully as strong in her as in Yeats. Weygandt considers that with her remarkable versions of the old stories in Gods and Fighting Men and Cuchulain of Muirthemne she has done more than any other writer of the Gaelic countries to bring home to us the wonders of Gaelic romance.¹ If Yeats interested her in the drama as the great art form for Ireland, she in turn taught him to use the language of the Irish folk, to reveal as he says "the true countenance of the folk". Whatever she may have learned of idiomatic method from Douglas Hyde in the course of their numerous collaborations and in her translations of his Gaelic, it is certain that she greatly enriched and broadened Hyde's idiom from her own observations of the peasants of Kiltartan in Galway. She was heart and life a part of the movement which Yeats sponsored; she backed it with money, with the drudgery of managing its least artistic phases; she wrote plays to its order when it needed comedy; she lectured for it, lived for it.

How closely do the plays of Lady Gregory, who, because she was most intimately associated with Yeats, might be expected to carry out his theories most exactly, illustrate his artistic canon of "the rich, far-wandering, many-imaged life of the half-seen world," a canon which leaves no place for realism of any sort?

1. Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 138.

It is true, of course, that the little farces of peasant life which have been so immensely popular were written because the new theatre needed such plays, but it is also true that they, not the folk-history plays, are the individual, living part of her dramatic output. She is remembered for her Workhouse Ward and Spreading the News rather than for Dervorgilla or Kincora. Hyacinth Halvey or even the butcher is far more of a human reality than Diarmuid, Flann or Brian. Even Grania, agreed upon by all critics as the best of the six folk-history plays, is not a great play. According to Boyd it "rises above the fairly commonplace level of its companion plays precisely in proportion as it emulates the manner of Synge. His rhythms are in such speeches as: 'But you and I have changed the world entirely, and put a curb upon the spring-time, and bound the seven elements with our strength.'"¹ After quoting a number of such passages, he adds, "Yet one cannot compare the eloquent beauty of Synge's poetic idiom with these somewhat forced effects, without feeling that the latter are echoes rather than the expression of an original sense of verbal music." Lady Gregory's own feeling as to the comparative worth of these plays going back to legendary old kings and old heroes which were to Yeats the source of true national drama, is shown in her apologetic, "Perhaps I ought to have written nothing

1. E. A. Boyd: Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 133.

but these short comedies, but desire for experiment is like fire in the blood."

If then, these plays which most nearly approximate Yeats's views of true Irish drama in source, material, and spirit, are not the characteristic and valuable part of Lady Gregory's plays, the question arises: in what relation do the peasant farces stand to those theories?

That they have struck a sympathetic chord in the Irish thought and feeling their popularity will attest. They are performed at the Abbey theatre two or three times as often as are the plays of any other playwright. In 1912 there were sixteen performances of The Rising of the Moon as against three of The Playboy of the Western World, while The Workhouse Ward was performed more than twice as many times as Colum's study of a workhouse, Thomas Muskerrey. In neither instance was Lady Gregory's play comparable in real artistic breadth and depth to the play which found so much less favor among Irish people. Argument from popularity is always dangerous evidence, but does not this long continued popular favor indicate that Ireland thinks it sees itself portrayed in these plays; portrayed as it likes to think it is? The poetical plays of Yeats which openly professed to deal with far-away things never attained anything like the popularity of these comedies purporting to show the present-day peasant as he is.

In order to realize how far Lady Gregory does get

away from the poetical drama in which Yeats was primarily interested, one has only to remember two parallel passages from the two authors. In describing the contentions of Ireland Yeats makes Cuchulain say: "Townland against townland, barony against barony, kingdom against kingdom, province against province, and if there be but two door-posts to a door the one fighting against the other."¹ In The Workhouse Ward when Mike McInerney in response to his fellow's doleful, "To be lying here and no conversible person near me would be the abomination of misery!" begs his sister to take Michael Miskell also, she replies, "Yourself and Mike that never left fighting and scolding and attacking one another! Sparring at one another like two young pups you were, and threatening one another after like two grown dogs!" Cuchulain's speech is poetry; the peasants' an idiomatic version of "It is better to be fighting than to be lonesome." Cuchulain is a creature of fancy, as far removed from a half-savage chieftain as can well be imagined. The two old paupers are another sort of being--they are Galway peasants of to-day touched with a rather tolerant imagination. One feels in all the farce-comedies, that is, in all the really characteristic work of Lady Gregory, this branching away from Yeats, this half-approach to "the machine shop of the realists."

And yet Lady Gregory is not a realist in any strict

1. Golden Helmet, in Collected Works, Vol. V., p. 75.

sense of the word and is certainly never a descendant of Ibsen in having a reformer's motive back of her work. She would protest as emphatically as Yeats against the opponents of the new school "who are ever begging us to attack the priests or the English, or wanting us to put our imaginations into handcuffs so that we may be sure of never seeming to do one or the other."¹ Neither has she any intentions of reforming her peasant or of arousing sympathy for him, motives which animated many of the writers of continental peasant drama. The picture she presents of him is never drawn in harsh lines. He is an absurd creature who regulates his life by superstition and wise old saws; who has a picturesque and homely speech which illustrates Yeats's contention that beautiful language nowadays exists only in the speech of the poet and of the very poor. His very inconsistencies and illogicalities make him a being without the pale of ordinary moral standards. His relation to his creator is something like that of a child to a grown-up who feels none of the responsibility of near kin and therefore is free to enjoy his whimsicalities and laugh at his incongruities.

This kindly treatment of the peasant as compared with the treatment given him in the plays of the later Irish writers is probably to be explained in Lady Gregory's consciousness of

1. Samhain, 1905, in Collected Works, Vol. IV., p. 204.

superior position and intellect. She presents only a superficial view of the peasant because from her detached position she sees only his delightful picturesqueness and fails entirely to see the sordidness and harshness which lurk under his genial exterior. These qualities Lennox Robinson, Padraic Colum, St. John Ervine and the others of the younger group, because they are of the people, see and wish to remove. And in proportion as Lady Gregory fails to give us "a whole man" she is producing pleasing caricature, not character, and subordinating real drama to an interest in idiom.

In one other respect Lady Gregory fails to produce reality: in the restriction of motives almost solely to fear of a neighbor's opinion. Love, hatred, altruism, patriotism (except in The Rising of the Moon)--most of the great emotions which dominate life hardly enter into these peasant plays at all. Herein, probably, is the cause of the absence of conflict and passion.

In the light of these facts Lady Gregory's position in the general field of Irish drama can be seen. She is one link by which the National drama outlined by Yeats gradually became limited almost exclusively to the portrayal of the peasant. She gets away from the poetic drama and by the popularity which her peasant plays gained gives impetus to the young men just beginning to write, directing their attention to the really great fact of Irish life, providing them with precedent. But she is only semi-realistic--her peasant is

not the true worker of the land.

The works of J. M. Synge have been subjected to such extensive and intensive criticism that his position in the National school is well known. His prefaces are expansions of Yeats's pleas for imaginative drama, for an "art of the theatre that shall be joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant, and altogether reckless."¹ Synge expresses the same idea in his famous words, "On the stage one must have reality and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality."² If their theories of art are alike, Synge is far more able than Yeats to practice them without losing dramatic excellence. Yeats's feeling that beautiful language is to be found among the peasants reaches its flower not in his own plays but in the "romancin'" of Christy Mahon, the rich rhythm of which makes it rank among the most beautiful passages of English prose. "Let you wait to hear me talking, till we're astray in Erris, when Good Friday's by, drinking a sup from a well, and making mighty kisses with our wetted mouths, or gaming in a gap or sunshine,

1. Samhain, 1904, in Collected Works, Vol. IV., p. 173.

2. Preface to The Playboy of the Western World, 1907.

with yourself stretched back into your necklace in the flowers of the earth."

In material as well as in ideas of art and dialogue Synge agreed with Yeats. All of his plays except one deal with folk imagination as it has been developed through the long years of life along the west coast; that one exception is of an ancient legend which Yeats himself used, the story of Deirdre. And yet the difference between the two dramatists can be no better illustrated than by comparing their versions of the story. Yeats's Deirdre is a beautiful poem, sad in spirit. Synge's Deirdre, unfinished as it is, is a poetic tragedy of a high degree of power. One lacks reality; the other is informed with it. Why the difference? Chiefly this: Yeats is naturally a poet, Synge a born dramatist. He has breathed his own spirit into the old tale, and while using none of the methods of realism has achieved reality. Character and incident were to Synge no more than a means for the expression of his own vision of the glory of life and the splendour of its sadness."¹

Placed beside Lady Gregory's peasants, those of Synge show the same contrast of life and dimensions and passion which his Deirdre does in comparison with the Deirdre of Yeats. There is, to be sure, the same characteristic of un-morality,

1. Chas. Tennyson: Irish Plays and Playwrights; Quarterly Review 210, p. 230.

lack of what we are accustomed to think of as idealism; and the idiom is basically the same. Yet Maurya is a far more tragic figure than Mary Cahel in The Gaol Gate, Christy Mahon moves and pulsates with life as Hyacinth Halvey never does, although both are comic characters purporting to portray an actual individual. The great difference arises from Synge's patient selection and blending of characteristics into one rich whole. Lady Gregory's plays are like gossip poured forth in a broad stream rambling in every unimpeded direction. Synge's are carefully and strictly guided. Although he got the initial idea for his characters from living peasants in whom he saw a mixture of the god and the beast, his finished products are never typical peasants. He wrote of tinkers and tramps because their life seemed richer in imaginative elements than the life of ordinary people; but he added to even their picturesqueness and emphasized even their duality. He insisted that he used the language of peasants just as he heard it spoken in the kitchen and fish markets, but to make this speech "fully flavored as a nut or an apple" he carefully pruned away its waste elements. In the same way the situations of his plays, while originating in stories told by the peasants, are really selected and embellished by a discriminating artist.

Yet paradoxically enough, Synge in spite of the intense air of reality one finds in his peasants is not realistic, or at best only semi-realistic. Thomas MacDonagh of University

College, Dublin, contends that he is "often merely 'Celtic' in his phraseology though far more often rich and right. His fault in the matter was that he crammed his language too full of rich phrases...neglecting the common stuff of speech."¹ To quote Charles Tennyson again, "His plays are no more reproductions of material life than his language is a reproduction of the beautiful speech of the West. Its strange cadence and burning phrases represent not what the ear heard, but the music which the hearing bred in the mind."² The sum of the matter is that by exaggerating the richness of his peasant life in order to make drama which "nourishes the imagination" he has produced a reality which is far from being the Irish peasant of today. The facts that death found him at Deirdre instead of a peasant play, and that he told Yeats that he was "sick of the peasant on the stage" may be taken, perhaps, as an indication of his own feeling that for his purpose the peasant was not the best material. That point can never be settled; but there can be no doubt that his drama of modern peasants largely influenced the young realists, widely as they differed from him in artistic methods and in the amount of genius they brought to their work.

Today this Nationalist school is history rather than

1. MacDonagh: Literature in Ireland, p. 48.

2. Quarterly Review, Vol. 210, p. 230.

a present literary force. The premature death of Synge in 1909 just when he was beginning to turn toward folk history may be said to mark the climax of the movement. Since then there has been almost nothing to break its rapid decline. Lady Gregory's New Comedies, published in 1913, are decidedly inferior to the Seven Short Plays of 1909. Hyacinth Halvey resurrected in the later volume is no longer particularly humorous and has the same faults as in the play of 1909. Hackneyed farce elements continually appear throughout the plays; of the group The Image is the only significant piece and even it fails to be entirely convincing. According to Boyd this inferiority to the early comedies results from the original verve and zest having made way for a "certain mechanical effect which must be attributed to excessive exploitation of the same material."¹

As for Yeats himself, his last volume of plays Four Plays for Dancers published in 1921 is so thoroughly exotic that in spite of containing names as familiar as Cuchulain, Emer, and Dervorgilla, they seem more Oriental than Irish. The old Masterlinckian theories which first prompted him to simplify acting and stage effects now lead to the impressionism calling for marionette-like acting and the extreme of substituting for curtains a black cloth adorned with a suggestive emblem.

1. Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 129.

The cloth is to be folded and unfolded by the musicians who appear in each of the plays. In a significant note on At the Hawk's Well Yeats says, "My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick or setting up a screen against the wall." The model for this stage he finds in the "Noh" stage of Japan. Still another Oriental influence is to be found in the use of Japanese dancers and in masks for all the principal characters. Arabian mysticism, of which Yeats has always been a student, appears throughout these plays--in the dreams of Dervorgilla and Dermot, in the use of birds as symbols for subjectivity in Calvary, in the discussion of the source of woman's beauty in The Only Jealousy of Emer. Of the plays Yeats says, "In writing these little plays I knew I was creating something which could only succeed in a civilization very unlike ours."

When the founder of Nationalist drama has carried his cult of poetry and old legends so far that his output is no longer more than slightly reflective of anything national and when his associates are no longer writing, the school may safely be said to be dead unless it is being re-inforced by new writers. The playwrights of Ireland today are very far from the nationalist tradition, for they are interested in nothing but present day workers of the land or factory.¹ The

1. Lord Dunsany is clearly an exception to this statement.

influence which dominated Martyn is apparently as strong upon them as that of Yeats. They have combined the elements which to them seem best in the art theories of the two founders of the dramatic movement. While using the peasant which Martyn rejected, they have reverted to the type of drama which he advocated. The national school of drama at the distance of but little more than a decade from the death of Synge seems a mushroom growth of exceeding beauty, but short life because its roots failed to catch deeply into the real life of the Irish people.

But, although the poetic glamour of his plays would seem to place him in the Yeats school, he is excluded from it by the fact that he has never used Celtic myth and legend, preferring to invent one of his own which he arbitrarily attaches to the fabulous Orient. Except for the Celtic quality of imagination of Dunsany's plays, they can hardly be said to be Irish at all.

CHAPTER II.

THE RELATION OF THE NEW IRISH DRAMA TO MODERN DRAMATIC PRACTICE

In summarizing the modern drama which began in the work of Ibsen, Archibald Henderson says, "The drama of to-day, through the influences of modern science, of contemporary democracy, of shifting moral values, of the critical rather than the worshipful attitude towards life, of an irresistible thrust towards increased naturalism and greater veracity, has become bourgeois, dealing with the world of every day; unheroic, suburban, and almost prosaic, yet intensely interesting by reason of its sincerity and humanity; essentially critical in tone, proving all things, holding fast that which is good."¹ A little farther on he adds as almost his last sentence in The Changing Drama, "The drama of to-day embodies the social fervor of the epoch."

With the few striking exceptions of Yeats, Synge, Maeterlinck, and Rostand, the best modern playwrights of every nation have adopted with individual or national variations the artistic form known as "the drama of ideas" which accepts a

1. Changing Drama, Ch. X.

problem or a generalization upon a familiar society as the basis of the play, without allowing this underlying criticism to tyrannize over the characters. This drama of intellectual content differs from the thesis play in assuming its truth or criticism of life instead of setting out to prove it.

It has already been pointed out that Yeats and, under his influence, the other members of the national school of Irish drama rejected entirely the drama of ideas with its insistence upon the realistic method and the inculcation of a truth which the dramatist wishes to teach. The new writers in their turn have rejected the poetic drama of Yeats and the half-realistic portrayal of the peasant of Lady Gregory and Synge, for a conception of the drama which in spirit and technique harks directly back to Ibsen. A comparative study of the entire group of plays shows convincingly their relation to modern dramatic art in their unified realistic atmosphere, in the type of themes chosen and the handling of them, and in the artistic purpose of their authors.

The dramatist of today may do as he likes in regard to observing the pseudo-classical unities of time and place, but to the unity of action he adds another hardly less inviolable, that of impression. If the play is to be realistic the atmosphere must be of real people and real events; if it is tragic no speech can detract from the totality of tragic effect; if mystical, no trace of false spirituality and no

note of actuality must creep into it; if it is comedy a sense of foreboding tragedy must not oppress the reader. That the older Irish dramatists did achieve a high degree of unity of impression in their imaginative drama no one who has seen Riders to the Sea and Cathleen Ni Houlihan can deny. But the atmosphere of typical European drama is very different from that of Synge's west coast plays and Yeats's poems of Gaelic tradition. What dramatic atmosphere do the young playwrights choose and how successfully does each of them build it up into one unified whole?

There is always difficulty in generalizing upon the literary output of a group of writers because there is always a tendency in individuals to vary from their norm, to give rein to a human desire for experimentation. In the case of this later group of writers, however, the general characteristic is fairly clear. All of the plays with the exceptions of Ervine's Jane Clegg and Colum's Mogu, the Wanderer, deal with Irish people and Irish themes; all of the plays except Campbell's Little Cowherd of Slainge and Purcell's The Pagan and the dramatic dialogues of Padraic Pearse and Daniel Corkery deal with Irish themes through the medium of present day Irish people; in only one play, Boyle's Mineral Workers, is nobility introduced and then only as minor characters; in all but a very few plays, notably Robinson's The Patriots and The White-headed Boy, Ervine's Mixed Marriage and Colum's Thomas Muskerry, the char-

acters are peasants, drawn with careful attention to the realistic method. The plays last mentioned deal, respectively, with small trades-people, day-laborers, and petty officials. Considering how largely agricultural Ireland is, this preponderance of peasant plays seems properly expressive of the national life, while at the same time the few plays of middle-class townspeople are necessary to complete the picture of Irish life. Evidently, then, these later playwrights have attempted the drama of actuality--to show Irish life as it seems to them actually to be.

Tested in the light of this dramatic purpose, the plays of the group do, on the whole, show as intense unity of impression as the plays of Yeats and Synge, even though the atmosphere is totally different. There are several contributing causes. For one thing, every one of these authors has studied to good advantage, the one-act play, which like the short-story dares admit no material which is not necessary for building up a pre-conceived effect. There are few greater one-act plays than Mayne's The Troth, Robinson's The Clancy Name, and Ervine's The Magnanimous Lover, to mention the most important of the group. Even the plays designed to fill a whole evening are shorter and far simpler in construction than the average play, or than The Playboy of the Western World. Having limited themselves to a narrow canvas and few colors, the Irish realists have no great temptation to mar their work

by diversifying the impression.

From Ibsen and his followers, they have learned the value of preserving the unities of time and place where possible, not because of the "verisimilitude" early critics had insisted upon, but because of the heightened effect lent by unified place and time. In this entire group of plays, numbering almost thirty, there are only two, Boyle's Mineral Workers and Robinson's The Cross-Roads, in which the unity of place is not strictly observed. It is remarkable also that these two plays which are the only plays covering any great extent of time, are the two plays most faulty from the standpoint of dramatic effect. By contrasting the effect of Boyle's comedy with The White-headed Boy where the unity of time is preserved, and The Cross-Roads with Murray's tragedy The Birthright, one realizes the dramatic value of the much debated unity of time as an aid in building up an over-powering single effect.

That the Irish realists were thoroughly aware of the value of this compression of time is shown by the fact that with the exception of the two plays just mentioned, the action is always limited to a few weeks, usually not more than two. Their compression, however, is not the artificial thing achieved by the French classicists who insisted on the unity of time as a dogma, but that of Ibsen who by "an expanded fifth act" opened his plays relatively near the climax, skillfully sketching in the antecedent action as the narrative proceeds. Nearly every

one of the Irish realists uses this technical device over and over again. In the popular White-headed Boy all the history of the Geoghegan family denials and sacrifices for Denis, the smart one of them, is related hint by hint, and bit by bit throughout the comedy, so that the unity of time is not artificial. Similarly in The Birthright a really great tragic effect is largely attained by the skillful way in which the years of slowly growing friction in the Morrissey home are explained during the course of the dialogue. Back of the action of The Land are the years when Murtagh Cosgar's family has felt his iron hand; back of The Harvest is a long story of mis-education; John Ferguson and The Building Fund contain a great deal of delayed exposition; The Fiddler's House depends largely for totality of effect upon this compression of Conn Hourican's past life into the space of two weeks. As a matter of fact the synthetic method is used in no plays except The Cross-Roads and The Mineral Workers, already noted as comparatively rare instances where the general effect is not unified.

From this examination it is apparent that when these recent Irish plays fail in artistic effect, it is not primarily from lack of knowledge on the part of their authors of the rules of dramatic art. Usually the failures may be traced to the common fault of writers of less than the first rank, an over-stressing of legitimate devices. It was in striving for this unity which they know how to produce if one is to judge

by The Building Fund and The Patriots, that Boyle and Robinson piled up details until the comedies of the former become farces and the tragic The Cross-Roads of the other is little more than a melodrama of decidedly lurid cast. It is this amateurish uncertainty in handling their material which is the cause of the few discordant notes which creep into the plays. That the Irish playwrights know how to create good, high-spirited fun is shown in Mayne's The Turn of the Road and The Drone which show the humor and grace of homely life in North Ireland, just as Robinson's The White-headed Boy is from beginning to end a good-natured, intensely funny comedy of County Cork. The ability to produce real tragedy out of Irish life is shown in John Ferguson, The Birthright, Maurice Harte, Thomas Musker and others; yet the authors of all these plays do at times show amateurish exaggeration of the effect they are trying to produce.

In all of the plays of this group except The Mineral Workers the atmosphere is that of actual life on Irish farms or in Irish towns. Most of the scenes are laid in the all-purpose room of the Irish cottage, the kitchen with its bare furniture and turf fire. The characters usually are homely individuals of single motives and no great culture. Instead of the mystic landscapes and heroic figures of Yeats's drama we have small bits of land to which prosaic, hard-handed individuals must give their lives. Instead of the wild imagination and reckless

gayety of Synge's Galway peasants we have a heavy-footed peasantry contented with a life with no imaginative flavor. The atmosphere of these plays is not the thing of poetic glamour and imaginative sparkle which to the national dramatists was the aspect of Irish life worth portraying.

Many of the realists have used a thoroughly modern device in giving this sense of actuality, of unified impression to those who must depend upon the printed page for their knowledge of the plays: that is, in the use of stage directions which are not mere theatrical manager's jargon. To take for example a play by each of four different writers, Ervine, Murray, Mayne and Robinson. The opening descriptions on The Magnanimous Lover hint at the very essence of Ulster Protestant life in the mention of the oleograph of King William the Third crossing the Boyne and in the telling over of mottoes on the wall: "What shall it Profit a Man though he Gain the Whole World, if he Lose his own Soul;" "Blessed are the Humble and Weak;" "God is Here;" "Thou God seest me." In The Birthright the following stage direction is typical of the atmospheric heightening Murray habitually uses: "Bat's heavy step is heard again. Maura throws a shawl around her and takes a candle off the dresser. As the latch is lifted she draws the bolt and with feverish haste hands out the candle. The kitchen is very dimly lit by the glow of the fire." With a few words at the opening of The Turn of the Road Mayne shows us the whole busy,

homely setting of the Granahan family: "Opposite there is a fireplace with projecting breasts in which a turf fire is glowing. Mrs. Granahan and Ellen are engaged at the table washing and drying the plates after the supper. Thomas Granahan, the grandfather, is seated at the fireplace and has evidently just finished his stirabout." But still more reminiscent of the charming use of stage directions characteristic of Barker and Barrie are these in The White-headed Boy. "'Tis too high notions poor William always had--and his sister Ellen, worse again than himself, craning after anything new she's be like a cow through a fence--but indeed William's notions didn't stand too well to him, and when he died he left his family--six of them--no less--in a poor enough way." In this play the effect of jollity and high spirits is cleverly intensified by the use of narrative exit directions as: "Kate's off to the kitchen now. Amn't I after telling you she's a great help to her mother?" and "Here's Kate back again with the toasting fork;" or "She's all in a flutter. Wisha, she's cracked about Denis. Tisn't so easy to stir George--he's read it now."

To realize how far removed such directions are from those of Yeats who rejected the modern theory of detailed and literary stage directions, one has only to compare them with the following very typical direction: "Steps before the Palace of King Guaire. A table in front of steps at one

side with food on it, and a bench by table. Seanchan lying on steps. Pupils before steps. King on the upper step before a curtained door."¹

Critics have usually agreed that unity of impression is more easily obtained in plays in which physical action is not so important as psychological. Since the dramas of Ibsen showed so conclusively the intense dramatic effects to be derived from purely mental conflict, there has been a steadily growing tendency on the part of most of the best dramatists to stress that type of action. But Yeats with his pre-occupation with heroic legends would naturally depend largely upon physical action; Lady Gregory's farces naturally could not make use of Ibsen's principle, and Synge's rejection of the drama of ideas predisposed him against it. In the peasant plays of both the latter there is a good deal of physical action.

The plays of the young realists are in this respect as in so many others much influenced by continental standards. The action of Murray's Maurice Harte is as purely psychological as any of Ibsen's plays, in its stress on the clash of the individual and the group with the resulting spiritual tragedy when the individual succumbs. Similarly in The Birthright, except for the exchanging of Hugh's name on the trunk for Shane's and for the last tragic moment when the mental conflict

1. Kings Threshold.

finally flames into physical struggle there is little bodily action. In John Ferguson there is almost no physical action on the stage, though deep spiritual struggle in Hannah, Andrew, Jimmy Caesar, and John Ferguson. Of Ervine's other plays Mixed Marriage and The Orangeman show physical action only in the last scenes, and The Magnanimous Lover is purely psychological. In the last-mentioned play, at the end of the long conversation in which Maggie Cather has been probing into Henry's motives, the following bit of dialogue sums up the whole struggle:

Maggie: You want to marry me, Henry?

Henry: Because it's a debt I owe to God. If
I could save your soul I'd be paying
Him back.

Maggie: And if I don't marry you?

Henry: I shall have tried all the same. I
can do no more.

Maggie: Henry, you're worse nor I thought you.
You're not thinking of me nor the
wrong you did. It's yourself you're
thinking of. You're afraid of God,
and you want to use me to buy Him off.
You can well call yourself a God-fearing
man, Henry. I'm nothing to you. The
child you're father of is nothing to
you. You're just frightened out of
your wits for fear you'll go to hell
for all you're saved. I won't marry
you. I'm as good as you are for all
I'm not saved. I'm better nor you
are, for I'm not afraid of God.

One does not need to point out the fact that such a passage would never occur in a play in which the action is to any considerable extent in the physical plane.

In Colum's plays the emphasis is altogether upon the inner struggle. In The Land there are two deep psychological struggles. One of these is between Matt Cosgar and Ellen, the mutual bond of their love balanced by his affection for the land and by her desire "to be doing other work, and to be meeting strange people. And instead of bare roads and market towns, to be seeing streets, and crowds and theaters." The other conflict is between Matt and his father, old Murtagh Cosgar, who has driven away from home eight children in his iron determination to rule his family body and soul. Throughout this play there is little bustling or idle talk except in the characters of Sally and Cornelius who are introduced for purposes of contrast.

In Thomas Muskerrey, although there are no long searching dialogues and although the psychological action is broken by entrances of other characters and by new development of incident, still the real action is in the mind of the old master of Garrisowen as he is driven by his scheming relatives, first from the position he has held for thirty years, then into going to his daughter's home instead of the little cottage where it has been his cherished dream to live his last days to himself, and finally into death in a pauper's bed because he would not give up his dream. It is this losing struggle which in the short space of two months turns him from a healthy, benevolent elderly man to the shaken, thick-tongued wrack of a being who

mutters with slack lips and cheeks, "It's--it's--the pau--pauper's bed they've given me."

In The Fiddler's House the influence of Ibsen is even more apparent. The narrow thread of plot is carefully and fully developed by showing the inner struggles of each of the characters. The most subtle example of this spiritual conflict is in the conversation in which Maire makes her decision to go on the roads with her father rather than to risk her high-spirited life to her lover's hard strength.

Maire: Do you know where I saw you first, Brian?

Brian: Where was it, Maire?

Maire: In a field by the road. You were breaking a horse.

Brian: I was always a good hand with a horse.

Maire: The poor beast was covered with foam and sweat and at last you made it still. I thought it was grand then. Are your brothers with you, Brian?

Brian: (with somber passion) No. My brothers are not with me. I quarreled with them all, and I'm nearly heartbroken for what I did.

Maire: Ah Brian MacConnell, I don't know what to say to you at all.

When she refuses to give him her promise, he asks, "How was I to know that you would take that quarrel to heart?" and she replies: "I thought you were strong, but I see now that you are only a man who forces himself to harsh behavior. I have my own way to go; my father wants to go back to the roads, and it's right that I should be with him, to watch over him."

When Brian asks despairingly what shelter she will have on the road, she answers, "I'll have the quiet of evening, and my own thoughts, and I'll follow the music; I'll laugh and hold up my head again." There is a restraint about this choice which recalls Nora Helmer's last words to her husband.

Of Robinson's plays The Clancy Name and The Patriots contain the most searching internal conflict. In the former play the entire struggle is developed in the dialogue of the half-crazed boy who begs for the relief of confession and his mother whose pride of family name will perish if it is known that a Clancy was a murderer. Even to the last lines of the play there is only quiet, tense conflict between mother and son, although the stage is full of excited neighbors who do not understand the significance of John's broken words frantically hushed by Mrs. Clancy. In The Patriots the plot develops almost completely in the dialogue which skillfully relates the past events of James Nugent's agitator life, his hoarding his strength during the eighteen years of prison life, his flaming desire to serve his country in his own way, his disillusionment as to the spirit of Ireland, and finally his surrender to the commonplaceness about him when he realizes how much misery his patriotic fervor has brought to his friends and family. There is something of the spirit of Brand in this old rebel who must give all to his country, and in the tragic quality of his failure. Artistically, The Patriots

is the best of Robinson's plays, although it is unfortunate in having its thesis so soon disproved by the events of the Easter uprising. Both The Cross-Roads and The Harvest fall far short of the other two in the admission of the blustering and brutal show of physical violence in the first and in the lack of any deep reading of the thought lives of the Hurley family in the latter. There is an attempt to do this in the character of Mary but somehow she fails to ring true in her insistence that she cannot live away from the alluring excitements of London.

The White-headed Boy illustrates a peculiar characteristic of the Irish realists that no matter how painstaking they are in making their serious plays full of intellectual content, when they come to write comedy, the work of their countryman, Shaw, has no influence whatsoever upon them. All the comedies of the entire group, The White-headed Boy, The Turn of the Road, The Drone, The Mineral Workers, and The Family Failing are full of stirring about, entrances and exits, short, smart dialogues, showing little reflective depth. The observations of Uncle Bartle and Grandfather Granahan are, perhaps, the only philosophical elements in any of these comedies. It would seem that Mayne and Boyle use these old men somewhat as Maeterlinck uses them, as a substitute for the ancient Greek chorus. At any rate the atmosphere of the comedies is always that of hustling activity; it rarely seems slap-stick farce,

though there are moments when it approaches this lowest type of drama. It is interesting, however, to notice that in spite of its poor technical structure (almost nothing happens in the whole first act), Mayne's The Drone is perhaps the best comedy in modern Irish literature, excepting only Synge's plays.

In the case of the authors who have only single dramas to their credit, there is a notable placing of the action in mental struggle. MacDonagh's When the Dawn is Come, while covering the space of time necessary for the battle in which Thurlough is wounded and for the two councils to be held, is really only a long exposition of the motives and mental make-up of the hero who by his deep, almost super-human vision can see farther than his companions and by his courage is willing to risk more than they for what they are all fighting. He is the true dreamer who must lose himself in proving the worth of his dream. Joyce's The Exiles, a recent ambitious attempt at the drama of ideas, is as static from a physical standpoint as Rosmersholm. Unbroken dialogues pages in length compose the action, which is really only an exposition of how and why certain extreme types of character react in a very ordinary situation. Joseph Campbell's Judgment in spite of containing a death scene and an Irish wake lacks any considerable amount of action. In the first act there is talk of the demented old tinker woman, Peg Straw, and one hears her cries as the other tinkers beat her. At the end of the act she crawls to

the cabin to die. The second and third acts although dealing with Peg's wake and full of the atmospheric wildness of Donegal mountainsides contain no action other than that which results from a stranger's quarrelsomeness. When the watching peasants realize that the stranger is Peg's son he is turned out of doors quietly and decently.

If in this treatment of action the young realists have rejected the theories of Yeats they have still further rejected his method of poetic symbolism. The rare instances of symbolism found in their plays are always of a type entirely different from that of Yeats. The "man-headed birds" in Shadowy Waters and the fairy songs in Land of Heart's Desire symbolizing imaginative longing for freedom are replaced in the later drama by the beggar's fiddle which in The Turn of the Road stands for Robbie John's restless longing to escape the narrow restriction of his home and give himself to his art. The fiery patriotism of James Nugent symbolizes the spirit of his generation, but it is a very different sort of symbolism from the gold helmet of Yeats's play upon patriotic motivation. A symbol typical of the realists is the union of Hugh Rainey and Nora O'Connor in Mixed Marriage as symbolic of the best union of Protestants and Catholics. Mrs. Rainey expresses the idea thus: "When ye're as ould as A am ye'll know that your own need is the wurl's need. It's love that Nora an' Hugh need an' it's love the wurl needs. Ye're wrong til be sug-

gestin' partin' til them. Can't ye see, they're doin' the very thing ye want Irelan' t' do? It's Cathlik an' Prodestan joinin' hands thegither." In the same way the huge, heavy drum which the McClurgs have always carried in the Orange procession symbolizes Ulster bigotry in The Orangeman. Again, taking to the old easy chair in The Family Failing represents the family weakness of laziness. By comparing such homely symbols as these with the poetic, fanciful symbolism of Yeats's plays one realizes something of how consciously the young playwrights must have chosen to follow continental realistic standards.

Another aspect of this realism of theirs is in their rigid exclusion of all elements which might seem accidental or adventitious. In but few instances does one feel that there is any improbability in the actions of the characters. The most outstanding examples of insecure motivation are in The Mineral Workers and The Cross-Roads. The former is full of accidental coincidences which provide "laughs" but do not give any illusion of reality. The plot of the latter play is based upon a double improbability: first, that a girl of Ellen's refinement and spirit could give herself to a man like Tom Dempsey, who when he comes to her after their parents have arranged the match, orders her to come out to him, shouting angrily, "What the devil's keeping you, can't you come on out?" But if one can, by a stretch of imagination, grant that Ellen

could marry this type of man, it is utterly impossible to believe that the loveless marriage could put "a black curse on the farm" so that the up-to-date agricultural methods advocated by Ellen make her neighbors rich, while at the same time ruining the Dempsey farm, destroying the fertility of the land, and causing the stock and even Ellen's own children to die.

With the exception of these two plays, so often noted as exceptions to so many different artistic practices, there is little weak motivation. The tragic situation of fratricide in The Birthright, one of the most difficult to work up to, is rendered thoroughly probable by Shane's years of repressed feeling against his mother's partiality and by Hugh's shock of disappointment in being suddenly thrust out of what he had all his life supposed to be his birthright. If anything more were necessary to give probability, even inevitability to the outcome, it is to be had in the fact that the action is in the gloom and unreality which any poorly lighted room has in the very early hours of morning.

Another situation difficult to motivate is in Mixed Marriage when Nora runs out into the crowd of rioters to meet her death. But this apparently mad action seems probable when one understands her remorse as she begins to doubt herself and to feel that by refusing to give up Hugh she has been the cause of this bloody disturbance. When one comprehends

the extreme nervousness which makes her start at Rainey's shadow, and finally ask excitedly, "If A was t' die mebbe it wud put things right?", one does not question her action. The other of Ervine's plays where the situation is difficult enough to require a fairly skilled dramatist to handle it successfully is John Ferguson. The play is undoubtedly marred by the introduction of "Clutie John" who finally goads Andrew into avenging his sister's wrong. "Clutie John" belongs to the long line of half-fools who have so fascinated dramatists, and who invariably have flashes of deeper insight than have the chief characters. Unquestionably "Clutie John" is more than slightly improbable and stereotyped. But the really great situation in the play, the resignation of John Ferguson to the cruel fate which has overtaken him, is handled skillfully, in almost masterly fashion. The habits of all his past life and the ideal of patient endurance which he has been building through the years of smaller trouble are strong enough to account for his submission to the final catastrophe that his only son shall die on the gallows for a confessed crime.

As a rule the motivation of the shorter plays is as careful as that of these long plays just discussed. Mrs. Clancy's forcing John to die unshriven with the load of his guilt on his mind is explicable by her natural hardness and by her inordinate pride of family name. Maurice Harte's insanity is the natural result of the unendurably high nervous tension put upon his sensitive and extremely conscientious nature at

a time when he is greatly overworked with pre-ordination study. Maggie Cather refuses Henry Hinde in The Magnanimous Lover as much because she fears the hideous life she will have to live with him as because of her old anger with him and her present contempt for him. Maire Hourican refuses her lover both because she is afraid of his masterful ways and because she has some of her father's love for the adventure of the life on the roads. The plays of Padraic Pearse, poetic and slight in plot as they are, are still done with a good deal of attention to the rules governing dramatic motivation.

In general it would seem that in this respect at least the young writers have carefully heeded an admonition of Yeats: "The moment we depart even a little from folk tradition as we must in the drama, if we do not know the best that has been said and written in the world, we do not know even ourselves. It is no great labor to know the best dramatic literature for there is little of it. We Irish must know it all, for we have, I think, far greater need of the severe discipline of French and Scandinavian drama than of Shakespeare's luxuriance..... Let us learn construction from the masters, and dialogue from ourselves."¹

It has been shown that in atmosphere and technical methods the later Irish dramatists differ greatly from the founders of the modern Irish dramatic renaissance; in the last

1. Samhain, 1901; in Collected Works, Vol. IV.

analysis, however, the respect in which they depart farthest from the National group is in dramatic purpose. Their work shows little or no tendency to attempt with Yeats and Synge "to re-discover an art of the theatre that shall be joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant, and altogether reckless". And they disagree entirely with Yeats's, "We are, it may be, very stupid in thinking that the average man is a fit subject at all for the finest art."¹ Much more appealing to them is the dramatic art which is a means of improving the social order of their day. If Henderson was correct in his generalization upon the characteristic drama of to-day as embodying the social fervor of the age, it is easy to see, even with a cursory examination, that the Irish playwrights of to-day have accepted implicitly the standard of their age. They, like the continental and English and American dramatists mentioned by Henderson, strive to be "leaders, not merely spokesmen of the ideas and feelings of the motley throng assembled in the play-house."

These writers are interested neither in glorifying and extracting beauty from Irish tradition as Yeats was, nor in getting fun from the picturesqueness of the peasant as Synge had done. The story drama has little attraction for them. The most significant single statement of the dramatic

1. Ibid., p. 72.

purpose of these realists if that of St. John Ervine in The Forum of August 1914: "The terrible danger of the Irish people is that they may find plenty of food for their bellies, but find none for their souls--..... The incredible wrangling over the question of the Municipal Art Gallery in Dublin; the brutal manner in which the employers conducted the lock-out in 1913; the terrible record of the gombeen men in the little lonely towns and parishes throughout the country; the dreadful story of the Dublin slums and the sweated industries of Belfast; the bestial bigotry in which Ulster is enveloped; all of these things have become plain in the bright light of the prosperity which has now risen in Ireland; and it is the plain duty of the artist to tell these things as it is his plain duty to tell of a proud spirit when the proud spirit is alive."

That Ervine was expressing the belief of the whole group of writers under discussion is clearly shown by an analysis of the plays as to themes and method of treatment. In at least half of the plays the hard, unimaginative, fairly prosperous peasant figures. Murtagh Cosgar, Mike and Tom Dempsey, Turnour in Thomas Muskerrey, Bat Morrissey in The Birthright, William John and Samuel James Granahan in The Turn of the Road, the McMinns and John Murray in The Drone, all of the Grogans in The Building Fund, Dan Fogarty in The Mineral Workers, and Tom Carragher in The Family Failing, are the most striking examples of this present day reading of the Irish

peasant with his over-weening love of the land which leads him into various undesirable modes of thought. As a discussion of this new peasant genre is reserved for a later chapter, it is sufficient to note here that in presenting the peasants in this light the playwrights seem to be trying definitely and consciously to bring Irishmen to a realization of the evils of common life in their country.

In some of the plays the purpose of the author is so clear that the theme becomes almost propagandistic. Robinson's Harvest, for instance, is a warm protest against the old educational system which trained Irish children away from the farm and unfitted them for their natural duties, this system being personified in William Lordan, the old school-master who prides himself in having made his pupils dissatisfied with the coarse, "narrow" life at Knockmalgoss. Another play dealing with a similar theme is Maurice Harte, which, while not so directly propagandistic as Harvest, is nevertheless a forceful argument against a social system which limits the value of educational training to the priesthood. The Cross-Roads is directed against the Irish patriarchal marriage system which means loveless marriages. The Patriots is a cry against the new reformist methods of compromise which Robinson believed to have killed the Irish spirit. In one sense the play is an attempt to arouse the whole fighting spirit which had temporarily lulled. The tragic situation of Seumas O'Kelly's The Bribe

springs from the corruption of Irish petty politics; and Boyle's comedy The Eloquent Dempsey deals with the contemptible tactics of the petty politician. The Mineral Workers attempts to show the Irish their short-sightedness and narrowness in refusing to allow their "bit of land" to be disturbed under any consideration of commercial or national or industrial prosperity. Ireland is personified by Dan Fogarty who prefers to wreck the venture rather than give the right of way through his tiny farm, and who brags of his financial acumen when he sells cabbages to the miners while his neighbors' land is being ruined. In the end, of course, Fogarty is forced to surrender to modernity symbolized by the mine. Still another play, Mixed Marriage is a passionate plea to the people of Ireland, in this case the plea being for more tolerance. A particular stress is laid upon the fact that religious bigotry is especially disastrous to the workers.

If the plays just mentioned are almost direct appeals for certain social reforms, practically all the other plays of the group contain, directly or indirectly, reproof for certain phases of Irish character. The Drone and The Family Failing show how the laziness and perpetual dreaming to which a certain type of Irishman is given results in degeneration of moral fibre. On the other hand, there is a protest against the domineering peasant who attempts to force his children into beaten paths in The Land, The Fiddler's House, The Clancy Name, Maurice Harte, The Turn of the Road, and Mixed Marriage.

The intolerance and bigotry of Ulster is roundly satirized in The Turn of the Road, The Magnanimous Lover, Mixed Marriage and The Orangeman, in fact in most of the plays by the Ulster dramatists.

Further detailed examination would show that with the exceptions of Fitzmaurice's fantasies, Dandy Dolls and Magic Glasses, there are no plays in the entire group which do not exhibit in some measure an attempt to mould Irish thought and the character of Irish peasantry. In general, one must feel in surveying the New Irish Drama that in atmosphere, in technical methods, in spirit, and in purpose, it resembles the modern drama of ideas so closely as to indicate conscious application of continental principles of dramatic art.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW PEASANT GENRE.

The first reaction of the new Irish drama upon readers who have delighted in the peasant plays of Lady Gregory and Synge is apt to be a certain bewildered and horrified doubt. Such a reader with his mind full of Hyacinth Halvey, Christy Mahon, Martin Dougl, and the other famous folk characters, is shocked by the treatment of peasant life found in the new plays. It is safe to assume that the general reading public is accustomed to think of the Irish peasant as an altogether delightful figure, something like nothing else human under the sun, something entirely un-moral and irresponsible, something so credulous as to believe every rumor and so childlike as to enjoy a "gallous story" which shocks deeply when seen in reality; a creature of fits and starts of passion, of imaginative-ness beyond that of all but the most carefully nurtured individuals of other lands; a simple pastoral being dressed in rags or the coarsest of homespun, but speaking a rich, lyrical language with a rhythm which poets may envy. This peasant is a man of no substance and with no desire for any--voluntarily a wanderer, a beggar, tramp, or tinker living in the open, at home anywhere, dependent for his next meal upon the favor of God and his own wit; with Christy going "romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment

day." In his highest moments he is superb and wild; in his most commonplace aspects he is deliciously naive and picturesque. His philosophy of life is in the gusto of the tramp who says to Nora Burke in The Shadow of the Glen, "You'll be hearing the herons crying out over the black lakes and you'll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm: and it's not from the like of them you'll be hearing a tale of getting old like Peggy Cavanagh, and losing the hair off you and the light of your eyes, but it's the fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up, and there'll be no old fellow wheezing the like of a sick sheep close to your ear."

In turning from this familiar figure to that which has succeeded him, it is interesting to compare the literary motives of the National writers as explained by Synge to those of the present day writers as summed up by St. John Ervine. Said Synge in discussing the use of the peasant as dramatic material: "In countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for the writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry in a comprehensive and natural form."¹ Or again: "In Ireland for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is

1. Preface to Playboy of the Western World.

fiery and magnificent and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the spring time of the local life is forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only."¹ The logical result of such a view of the peasant is the drama of imagination of the National writers.

Contrast with such a view the statement of Ervine: "The Irish dramatist writes his plays around peasant character because peasant life is the national life, because peasant influence is the strongest influence in Ireland..... The Irish peasant has remained national and local, but the Irish lord and middle-class man have become de-nationalized, aping the English in thought and act and speech. The Irish dramatist is compelled to make the peasant the protagonist of his plays, for the peasant has national courage and meanness, cowardice and nobility, humor and the lack of it, cruelty and gentleness, high feeling and low feeling, wit and dullness, generosity and greed all mingled in his nature; and these things are the stuff of drama."² The logical result of this artistic conception is a realistic figure whose fancies are no wilder and whose words are no more musical than those of the actual flesh and blood, weather-beaten, gombeen haunted, unlettered peasant.

On the other hand one discovers soon after beginning

1. Ibid.

2. The Irish Dramatist and the Irish People; The Forum, June, 1914.

to study the new treatment of rural character that if the Irish peasant has had his wings clipped and his feet securely anchored to reality, he is not, except in rare instances like Tom Dempsey in The Cross-Roads, the brutal, utterly debased being described by Tolstoy, Hauptmann, and the other continental writers of naturalistic peasant drama. Unlike them he does not reek of the barnyard until delicate sensibilities are offended to nausea. His is rather the atmosphere of narrow boundaries, of too much tea-drinking with cronies of no wider outlook than his own, of too great pre-occupation with the acres and cottage which are his--in short, of too little "food for his soul" as Ervine said. There are many evident traces of naturalistic influence throughout these new Irish plays; a little of the feeling expressed by Zola, "There is a tinge of the human beast in all of us as there is a tinge of illness." But there is never the extreme of Zola that "to make character mortal, everything must be told."¹ There is not even an extreme carrying out of the basis of naturalism, man's utter helplessness at the hands of Nature. To quote Zola again, "Man is no longer an intellectual abstraction for them naturalistic dramatists ; he is a thinking beast, who forms part of Nature and who is subject to the multiplicity of influences of the soil on which he grows and where he lives."²

1. Zola: The Experimental Novel, p. 127.

2. Ibid., p. 151.

How carefully these plays avoid the extreme of naturalism is to be seen in examination of the last speech of Tom Dempsey in The Cross-Roads, which is, as has been said, the only deeply naturalistic one of the plays. The lines are: "I'll tell you what I'm doing. I'm locking the door the way you won't go out after that young man; an' I'm going to step down to the village now for a sup of drink. An' then--I'm coming back; an' by God, I'll make you pay for this night's work, Ellen McCarthy, till you'll wish you were dead--the black curse you brought on this farm an' for the liking you have to the young man." Dark and hopeless as the situation is when the key "turns in the lock with a sound of dreadful finality," it is pale in comparison with some of the effects of The Powers of Darkness, Before Sunrise, or even the last scene of Ghosts. But the significant fact is that the play was done in Robinson's apprentice years and he has since never returned to any such reading of the peasant as a "human beast".

Naturalism enters into the plays of the Irish realists in much the same degree as it enters the plays of the realists of other countries. It shows in the choice of subjects from the life of the humble, in the lack of verbal or plot embellishment, in the creation of characters neither idealized nor exaggerated, in a view of life divested of its romantic aspects, in a certain level of character which excludes at once both heroes and villains, in the so-called pessimistic tendency to

call ugly things by their right names instead of glossing them over, in the recognition of natural laws of temperamental, biological and social determinism. With Irish realists as with other contemporary realists there is not, however, any indulgence in the extreme of naturalism which flowered in the slice-of-life drama of the late nineteenth century. The new Irish drama is an attempt to portray Irish life as it and every other life is--sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly, often merely prosaic.

If, then, the treatment of the peasant of recent Irish plays is neither imaginative nor gossipy as was that of the National drama, nor yet so darkly naturalistic as most of the continental peasant plays, what is it? The answer to this question is in the answer to a number of others. What are the traits of character most emphasized by the realists? What conditions, if any, are advanced as explaining the type of characters depicted? Are the present day peasants distinct enough from their literary forbears to justify the critic in considering them as a new genre? How true are they to actual Irish life?

One of the first differences one notices in these later Irish peasants is that of their comparative prosperity. They are men of small property, passionately attached to their "bit of land" and very ill-disposed toward the beggar or tramp

or tinker of the earlier plays. Except for the half-wit Clutie in the home of the Fergusons, who are represented as unusually soft and gentle, and for the admission of dying Peg Straw to the weaver's home against Nabla's will, there are only two instances where tramps appear in these plays. Moll Woods, the central figure of O'Kelly's The Smiler's Child, has been made a vagrant by the unkindness of society, and unlike Synge's tramps struggles against her lot. To her life in the open is not a joyous listening to "fine songs when the sun goes up" but a fearsome existence where the gray stone walls along the moon-lit roads are "like the polished bones of dead men," and the hedges "stretch out in front of me looking like two long arms holding up winding sheets for all the Shuiler's of Ireland." Until her final sacrifice of her child Moll meets nowhere any of the cordiality traditionally accorded to wanderers by the Irish peasant.

The other admission of a tramp into the plot is the case of the drunken fiddler in The Turn of the Road who is picked up off the roads and brought home by William James Granahan to serve as a "tarr'ble and awful warnin' to Robbie John what this sort of occupation brings a man til." A wholly modern attitude towards a tramp is suggested in Ellen's refusal to feed the battered old musician who has once been really great, and in Mrs. Granahan's firm: "Wind and string fiddle sticks. Out you go. Out you will go. I want no tramps in here upsettin' my house and makin' it the talk of

the neighbors. Out you go at once." This might be an irate American housewife speaking but never the National school peasant welcoming a wanderer in off the road with eager interest. Not every peasant family of the new plays is like the Granahan family, but the attitude toward life is essentially similar. The new Irish peasant is, as a rule, fairly prosperous and, it must be admitted, fairly hard.

One trait which the entire group of dramatists have emphasized in the new peasant is his cunning. Lady Gregory admitted this quality but touched it up with whimsy until it is no more repellent than an attractive child's schemes for a coveted privilege; Yeats's tramp in A Pot of Broth earns his supper by a bit of subterfuge which is thoroughly enjoyable. Synge's characters often have the same cunning but described with so much gayety and zest that one never thinks of censuring it. The most notable example of this cunning used for comic values is the case of the tinkers who wheedle a priest into marrying them for a new gallon can, then gag him and throw him into a ditch when he will not perform the ceremony until the can is forthcoming. But peasant cunning with the realists appears in a different light. It is not an entirely pleasant picture when William James Granahan, a Sunday School teacher and pillar in the community, boasts, "Nine and thirty year ha'e I gone til market, and no man, woman, child, dog, or divil ever got the better of me in a bargain yet, and right well you

know it. I sold the foal for thirty poun' and not a ha'penny less--a baste I wouldn't buy myself for thirty shillings." His son, Samuel James, further describes the fair scenes in a speech whose rhythm and humor do not entirely veil the author's attitude: "Boys, but Da is the hard man to plaze. We stopped at MacAlanan's on the way home and met William John McKillop and he toul the ould man he was a fool to let a good horse go at that price for he was lookin' all roads to give him forty poun'. Sure I knowed the ould Yahoo hadn't the price of a nanny-goat. But of course, Da tuk it all in for gospel. And me sittin' listenin' to him tellin' ould McKillop what a grand action the foal had and what shoulders the baste had and the way it could draw thirty hundred up Kiltainey hill without a pech."

Similarly in The Clancy Name the peasant's cunning in a trade is stressed. The neighbors admiringly characterize Mrs. Clancy as "a stiff one to drive a bargain with" or as having "the divil's own luck" in her business transactions; she herself says proudly, "You wouldn't find any one putting bad coins on me." The picture of old Timothy Hurley's attempt to save his farm by setting fire to his barn is altogether unpleasant. His cackling laughter as he boasts, "Forty pounds for one timber match", is met by one son's, "Sure I didn't think I had a Da with so much spirit;" the other son, however, does protest hotly.

Jack: I'm ashamed of you; how can you think of such a thing? Why it's--it's stealing!"

Timothy: Sure, who's to know I done it? Not a one saw me and I lighting the match.

Jack: That has nothing to do with it. Didn't you see how dishonest it was?

Timothy: Maybe I did, but I saw something more, and that was that I was on the way to being put out of the farm...and says I to myself "'tis time for Timothy to turn around and see what he can do."

Maurice: All the farm wants is a little money and it's hard to see you grudge us getting that.

Jack: I'll do more than grudge it--I'll give information.

Timothy: (plaintively) Wisha, 'tis hard you'd cross us now, and all you have to do is to hold your tongue. I'm sorry I ever told you at all instead of keeping it to myself but, sure, I thought you'd be pleased the same as Mauriceen was pleased.

This trait of peasant cunning runs through all the plays of the group but is especially prominent in Boyle's comedies. The incorrigibly lazy Dominic and Joe Donnelly even go to the lengths of enduring a few days of strenuous physical labor in their efforts to trick their supposedly wealthy uncle into giving them money. In The Mineral Workers this cunning is satirized by showing its weakness when opposed to real business acumen. In the beginning Dan Fogarty brags, "Oh, so you think you can butter me?" And when in the end he is beaten at his own game, his first thought is, "Out-jock-

eyed by a Yankee! Oh Lord!" In The Building Fund an avaricious old woman comes to realize that her miserly son and scheming grand-daughter are anxiously waiting the inheritance which comes to them at her death. Her cunning in outwitting them by willing the farm to the building fund for the new church being built in the community seems so heartless and inhuman that one almost feels pity for the victims although they certainly richly deserve punishment of some sort. In The Eloquent Dempsey are described the schemes of a many-sided saloon-keeper and politician to keep his popularity with all factions. In fact it is probably this insistent harping upon peasant trickery which as much as anything else calls forth Weygandt's criticism of Boyle: "He has picturesque phrase but no particular individuality in using it. Style he has not, nor any background of romance or beauty of that sort which illumines the grayness of the comedies of Ibsen, or of any other sort of beauty than that approach to beauty there is in skilled craftsmanship."¹

Another unpleasant trait of the Irish peasant emphasized by the realists is his love of petty power, especially his clinging to the old patriarchal system which makes a man absolute master of his house, his will on all questions to be obeyed mutely, his disposition of his children's future un-

1. Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 213.

questioned. In a number of plays, notably The Land, The Birthright, The Turn of the Road, The Mineral Workers, The Clancy Name, The Orangeman, and Mixed Marriage the action hinges upon the rebellion against parental authority which seems to be characteristic of this generation of Irish youth. Usually this love of power expresses itself in one of two ways, as the ordinary adult intolerance for the opinions of youth, or in the more vicious propensity of parents to force their children into grooves of thought and action in which they themselves have lived. A rebellion against the first mentioned characteristic of the Irish parent (and for that matter any parent who does not govern his natural tendencies severely) is found in the outburst of the hobble-hoy Tom Rainey in Mixed Marriage.

Mrs. Rainey: Does it iver occur til ye, John,
that Tom's not a wee lad anny more?
He's a brave big fella, now.

Rainey: He has no wit.

Tom: Ah, I have. A lot more'n ye think, on'y
ye nivir let me git a word out o' me,
but ye near snap the head off me.
A'm gettin' quaren tired o't, A tell ye.

Rainey: Ay, you'll be lavin' me, too. That's
the way. Bring up your childher well,
an' spare them nothin' an' they'll turn
on ye in yer ould age.

Mrs. Rainey: Mebbe, if ye wur a bit more o' a
friend til them, an' a wee bit less o'
a father, they wuddent turn on ye so
readily. Ye're alwis wantin' til
make them do things acause ye're their
father, instead o' waitin' fur them
til do it o' their own free will.

But more often, probably because a more dramatic situation, the plays treat of the second tendency of the Irish parent. This also is considered in Mixed Marriage. Hugh, like his younger brother, breaks away from the dominion of his father when he decrees that Hugh shall give up his Catholic sweetheart because "it's not right t' be marryin' out o' yer religion." One admires his spirit, as Ervine meant one to do, when, ordered by his father to renounce Nora or leave home, he replies: "A don't care. It'll be no grief til me til lave the house. A'm a man, an' not a chile, an' A'll choose me wife where A like, not where you like. A'm not afeard." And then to Nora: "Don't be cryin' dear. Sure this is on'y a bit o' bother that'll not last fur ivir..... We'll be married the quicker."

In The Land there is a similar situation in the refusal of Matt Cosgar to turn from Ellen to obey his father's command that he shall devote his life to the farm. Old Murtagh Cosgar, like Tom Rainey, is hard and tenacious of purpose, swayed by his love of authority. Lack of dowry and qualities which will make a good farmer's wife are, however, his objection to Ellen Douras. His obstinate disapproval springs from his besetting sin, passion for property, just as Rainey's has from his bigotry. "Boy, your father built this house. He got these lands together. He has a right to see that you and your generations are in the way of keeping them

together." Matt, too, loves the land, but he is young and in love. Both qualities ill dispose him to submit his will to his father's, and he prepares to go with Ellen to New York, leaving the farm to incompetent Sally and Cornelius.

It is not always, however, love which impels Irish youth to throw off too-heavy parental dominion. Robbie John Granahan in The Turn of the Road half-heartedly tries to obey his parents by giving up his music because he wants to win his sweetheart, Jenny Graeme. But when she encourages him to devote himself to his violin, promising to wait till he comes back rich and famous, he wastes no moments in defying his parents; and marches blithely out of the house with his father's curse upon his head, but his beloved fiddle under his arm.

In The Orangeman the revolt of youth is, as in Mixed Marriage and Purcell's The Enthusiast, against the bigotry which its young eyes see in its parents. When old John McClurg, who has carried the great drum at Orange processions for years, is so ill that he cannot go, he decrees that "a McClurg of some sort shall be in the procession the morrow to show the Fenians what the Protestants think of them." Forthwith, he has the orange sash tied to his son's waist and the blood-marked drum put in his hands. But the boy will have none of it. Ordered to think of the Battle of the Boyne, he declares he does not want to think of it. Threatened with disinheritance if he does not take his father's place, he responds stoutly: "I

wouldn't go near the field. I'm not an Orangeman, and I never will be. If you think I'm going to bother my head about your ould Orange lodges and your members of Parliament, talking their damned rot, you're quaren mistaken." When his father tries to enforce his command with taunts and physical coercion, the boy cried wildy, "I've bore a good deal from you, da, because you are my da, but I'll bear no more. I'm sick of you and your ould drum. Damn your drum." With these words he thrusts his foot through the historic drum, thus destroying what is the symbol for his family bigotry. As one reads play after play dealing with paternal intolerance and hard-headedness, one does not much wonder at Hugh Rainey's "It's a quaren thing when a man begins to respect his da."

In both the plays of T. C. Murray this parental tyranny is made the central theme, though in different aspects. In Birtheright Bat Morrissey, the typical hard, grubbing farmer of the new plays, rails against even the priest who has encouraged young Hugh Morrissey in his hurly playing. "Destroying the parish he is since he came into it, taking people away from their work and putting notions into their heads." Because he, like Murtagh Cosgar, Tom Carragher, Dan Fogarty, Mrs. Grogan, and the other well-to-do peasants, loves his land more than anything else, he decides to ship open faced and open-hearted Hugh, popular for his hurly prowess and verse making, off to America and leave the farm to Shane, the younger son, who is careful and plodding, with no wider ambition than

healthy stock and plentiful crops. Thus is the old tragedy of Cain precipitated, for according to all the customs the birthright was Hugh's.

The situation is no less tragic in Maurice Harte, a little two-act play which probably goes deeper into the life of the Cork peasant than any of the National plays do; which, although not so sparkingly clever as the earlier plays, has a high degree of hearthside sublimity. The Hartes like many another Irish family have sacrificed almost to the point of bankruptcy in order that they may prepare Maurice for the priesthood. Mrs. Harte speaks for all Irish Catholic mothers when she says: "I'm a strong healthy woman, with a healthy woman's appetite, and yet I could live for the rest of my days on a bit o' bread and a sup o' sour milk for the wonderful joy that comes rushing down on me night and day, and I thinking of him a priest of God." Maurice Harte differs from the plays already studied in that the Harte men are far more lovable than the majority of peasant characters. Owen and Michael, while "grubbing farmers" yet have more tolerance and are more disposed to be easy upon Maurice than is his mother who cries in the intensity of her disappointment: "And will you have no pity at all on us and on Owen here, that have slaved for you all our lives? Will you be talking wild, frightening, foolish talk about your conscience, and not think at all of them, nor of us, and all we done for you?" Finally her will prevails

and the wretched young man promises to keep on with his preparation. In this as in most other modern plays where the rights of an individual are sacrificed to a clannish family system, the result is tragic for all concerned. It should be mentioned in passing that from a standpoint of dialect Maurice Harte is almost as rich as some of the plays of the National group. In the homely chatter of Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Harte at the beginning of the play there is a good deal of Celtic lyricism in spite of its grip on the things of ordinary life.

In only three other plays does the mother use her influence to keep youth from doing what it feels it should do. Mrs. Clancy, because she has always ruled her son, body and soul, is able to stay him from the confession which is the only relief possible to his over-wrought soul. She is a type of the hard and grasping peasant who has so idolized name and property that her first cry at the news of her son's crime is, "May God pity me, what did I ever do to deserve this. My son a murderer and the Clancy name disgraced. Oh, Holy Virgin, have pity on me...I'll never be able to look the neighbors in the face again."

In two of Ervine's plays the mother weakens and attempts to interpose duty to the family against the child's conception of duty to himself. In her extremity Mrs. Ferguson pleads: "I don't want God's will! I want my son! It's nothing to me what he done--he's my son! I don't care if he

killed a hundred men--he's my son! I'll not let him go to jail--It's not right to be sending him away like that. He's my only son, and I'm an old woman. You had no call to be sending him away." In The Magnanimous Lover it is Maggie Cather's mother, rather than her father, who tries to force her into the marriage from which she recoils "with hot anger in her heart at the injustice of the world and at the 'unco' guidness' of her old time lover, Henry Hinde."¹

Still another characteristic common to most of the peasants of the new plays is the lack of the romantic element. The attention which has been called to the loyal and sturdily independent love of Hugh Rainey, Matt Cosgar, and Robbie John Granahan must not give an incorrent impression of the attitude of the Irish peasant toward romantic love. The characteristic attitude of all the older people and most of the younger is in the position of Rainey and Murtagh Cosgar and the Granahans. Even the gentle Fergusons are willing to force Hannah to marry the contemptible Jimmy Caesar in order to save the farm. And the whole feeling of the typical peasant about romance is expressed, curiously enough, by Mrs. Ferguson, who herself married for love. "She's a young slip of a girl with wayward fancies in her head, mebbe, but Jimmy's as good and substantial a man as she's likely to get, and he'll be a good husband to her. It's a great thing for a girl to get a comfortable home

1. Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 245.

to go to when she leaves the one she was reared in. There's plenty of young women does be running after this and running after that, but sure there's nothing in the end to beat a kind man and a good home where the money is easy and regular."

This unromantic atmosphere permeates practically all of the plays. Mrs. Clancy bargains as shrewdly for a wife for her son as she would over the purchase of a new colt. John Murray in The Drone proposes to shrewish and unattractive Sarah McMinn simply because he feels it will be money in his pocket to have a woman who will stop the waste in his home. And when he is threatened with the breach of promise suit, he says grimly, "I'd as soon do without the marrying if I could. I don't want the woman at all, but I'll marry her before she gets a ha'penny off me." Ellen McCarthy allows herself to be plighted to Tom Dempsey in spite of her affection for her Dublin lover, because as she says prudently, "Now that I've the chance of being mistress of a big farm--well, it's a great opportunity." Sentimental Julia Shea's life is made miserable for her in The Country Dressmaker by relatives who nag her into marriage as the best method of keeping her mother out of the poor-house and giving her a decent burial. In The Mineral Workers when all other schemes fail to win over coarse, bump-tious old Dan Fogarty, the Mulroys come round him by offering to him Kitty, the pretty daughter of the family. In general it may safely be said that romance in any except very young

people is practically non-existent in these plays.

It is significant that, with the single exception of The Magnanimous Lover, in every case where the play proceeds along unromantic lines, the underlying cause is love of the land and a blind belief in the land as the source of all possible happiness for Irish people. The past centuries of landlord oppression, of bitter, unrelenting struggle for the possession of the land, of dumbly laborious efforts to build up a prosperous farm, seem to have entered the soul of the present day peasant to make the land his guiding passion. Shaw's John Bull's Other Island hints at such a theme in the scorn of the returned Irishman for the grubbing virtue of a peasant who has given his life to reclaim an acre of waste land. Colum more than hints at it in a meaningful passage in The Land.

Murtagh Cosgar: Ah but that's the sight to
fill one's heart. Lands ploughed
and spread. And all our own;
all our own.

Martin Douras: Ay. All our own. But we made
a hard fight for them.

Murtagh Cosgar: Them that come after us will never
see them as we are seeing them.
Them that come after us. Isn't
that a great thought, Martin Douras?
And isn't it a great thing that we're
able to pass this land on to them,
and it redeemed forever? Ay, and
their manhood spared the shame that
our manhood knew. Standing in the
rain with our hats off to let a
landlord--ay, or a landlord's dog-boy,
pass the way.

The tragedy of life for this type of peasant is in Martin Douras's reply, "Ay, but the young are going fast; the young are going fast." In only two plays are there exceptions to his generalization. It is the daughters of Conn Hourican in The Fiddler's House who wish to settle into their own cottage and possess their own bit of land; in a very recent play, Clan Falvey by Daniel Corkery, Sean O'Falvey sits by the fireside reading old stories of the pride of his ancient name, while his son Hugh is out struggling feverishly to save the crop from destruction by a threatening flood. But these are exceptional cases. If the realists are interpreting aright the new Irish peasant, the striplings now in their youth will never be able to say with old-fashioned Ned Mulroy: "I'm an old man, brought up on the land--it's like a mother's face to me. I never cared for anything but land, and when I thought it was my own, I kissed it with the two lips of my heart. Oh God in heaven, more than life I worshipped it."

It should be noticed that this very closeness to primitive life which in the National school produced characters of the highest imaginativeness is probably at the root of the prosiness which the realists feel to be another characteristic of the peasant. Such a basic difference in characterization may be shown by contrasting parallel passages from plays of the two schools, and by showing the difference both in degree of lyric expression and in cause animating it, in the comparatively

rare moments when the peasant of the new genre rises from his usual unheroic level.

In all the early scenes of John Ferguson Jimmy Caesar, one sees if one stops to think about it, is not much less than a prosaic Christy Mahon, always dreaming of the great deeds he is going to do but at heart timid and cowardly. The contrast between the old and the new peasant is strikingly noticeable in the way these two men are handled. Christy is a delightful, rich figure in spite of his cowardice and egoism, and in the end discovers himself, but Jimmy remains "a collie" to the end. He is, moreover, denied the rhythmic, imaginative speech which would make him attractive as Christy is. He must all his life mourn dully, "I'm always imagining myself doing brave things and seeing people clapping me and making speeches about me, and printing things in the paper because of my greatness and gallantry; but if a cow was to make a run at me in the fields, I'd be near scared to death of it."

Another contrast showing the prosiness of the modern peasant may be seen by placing the love-making of Hugh Rainey against that of Christy Mahon. Now, Hugh's and Nora's love is as passionate as Christy's and Pegeen's, and a great deal deeper. But the language is no richer than an everyday peasant under the stress of a powerful emotion might be expected to use. "It's a quare fine thing t' be in love wi' you, Nora. Sometimes whin A'm thinkin' about it A can't onderstand it.

A'm just like a man wi' somethin' inside him that wants t' come out, and can't fin' the way. Ye know what A mane, don't ye? A want til tell ye, but A don't know how, an' a just stan' still wi' me tongue clackin' in me mouth like a dumb man's. A want til tell iv'rybuddy A'm in love wi' ye, an' goin' t' marry ye. A feel prouder nor the King o' Englan' or the Mayor o' Belfast." There is a world of real emotion in those lines, but emotion stammeringly, lamely, prosily expressed, if one compares it to Christy's well-known: "It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's or an earl's it-self, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips till I feel a kind of pity for the Lord God in all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair."

Nora's love for Hugh is far more sincere than Pegeen's but she can only say, "Aw my man, A cudden let ye go. A'd houd on til ye if the wurl' was til fall in anondher our feet if A didden let go." Pegeen, "the fright of seven townlands for her biting tongue," exclaims radiantly, "I'll be burning candles from this out to the miracles of God that have brought you from the south to-day, and I with my gowns bought ready, the way I can wed you, and not wait at all."

Two other parallel passages may be mentioned as especially significant. Myles Gorman, in Thomas Muskerrey is a blind old pauper who goes back to the wild free life of wander-

ing with the same relief as do Martin and Mary Doul in The Well of the Saint. Myles and Martin have lived the same sort of lives; Thomas Muskerrey's description of Myles Gorman:

"You feel he has the life of a young colt and then you're bound to think that in spite of the fact that he's blind and a wanderer, the man has not wasted his life" applies fully as well to Martin and Mary. Gorman's speech is more lyrical than that of most of the characters in the realistic plays, but is sober and commonplace in comparison with Martin Doul's joy in "hearing a soft wind turning around the little leaves of the spring and feeling the sun, and we not tormenting our souls with the sight of gray days, and the holy men, and the dirty feet is trampling the world." Colum's blind old wanderer only longs "to be out in the day and to feel the throng moving about, and to be talking to the men that do be on the road."

Even the peasants whose sensibilities are not dulled by unceasing manual toil are prosaic. Denis Geoghegan, Daniel Murray and the Donnelly men are certainly not open to the charge of industry in any form; all of them have been "spoiled" by indulgent relatives until whatever "grubbing morality" they may have had is completely dissipated. Ne'er-do-wells to the end, all of them, and yet, there is not a single poetic speech from one of them. Uncle Daniel Murray in The Drone is tolerable only because of the contrast he affords to his hard, grasping environment, but he never kindles the imagination.

Dominic Donnelly is downright contemptible as he sits in his easy chair, peacefully contemplating the sale of the family's last half-starved cow: "The cow's a dreadful bother--wanting something always. When she's not dry she's hungry--I wonder how we put up with her so long. That's God's truth. Better you'll be without her, and the worry of having to milk her." Now this is essentially Martin Doul's philosophy of life as he rejects the hardships of normal life for the entrancing existence which can involve no effort of disillusion. But what a difference in the reaction of the two characters upon the reader! Dominic Donnelly is a commonplace, worthless trifler--Martin Doul is a human soul rejecting actuality for the life of the imagination. The life of one is prose; of the other, poetry.

This prosiness, this lack of lyric impulse, this failure to be exalted and powerfully moved by the beauties of Nature is to the realists a central characteristic of the Irish peasant. In the unusual moments when he is moved to expression richer and more beautiful than is to be found in the ordinary speech of any countryman, the cause is always some human relation rather than the intense appreciation of Nature which stirred the national school peasant. In all of this the new dramatists are faithfully realistic. People of the soil are comparatively matter-of-fact and unimaginative; years of purely physical toil deaden the aesthetic sensibilities of any one. Narrow vocabularies ordinarily mean narrow range of thought.

With its muscle-straining combat with the forces of hostile Nature, primitive life, unfortunately, tends to repress human imagination--in real life. But the basic, fundamental emotion of life which stirs even the most prosaic men to some degree of lyric expression is, as the Irish realists insist, human relation--the wail of Grandfather Granahan when Robbie John falls a victim to his father's hardness; the passion of Michael O'Hara "to see the streets full o' happy men and weemen again, their faces shinin' wi' the glory o' the Lord God, an' the childher runnin' about in the sun and none o' them sick wi' hunger;" the maternal sacrifice of Moll Woods, the Shuiler; the emotional stress of Maurice Harte who is forced by his family to what he considers sacrilege; the patriotic fervor of James Nugent.

In conclusion, a statement of Yeats indicating the tendency of the young realists, then in 1907 just beginning to write, is arresting for its almost uncanny perception that a new peasant genre was upon the horizon. "The people they write of are not the true folk. They are the peasant as he is being transformed by modern life, and for that very reason the man of the towns may find it easier to understand them. There is less surprise, less wonder in what he sees, but there is more of himself there, more of his vision of the world and of the problems that are troubling him."¹

1. Collected Works, Vol. IV., p. 187.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALLACY OF "REGIONAL REALISM".

It has been the tendency of most of the critics who have studied the new Irish drama to insist that the realism which is so pronounced in the recent plays is "regional". By the term they imply that each playwright is concerned only with the life of the particular section of country in which he lives, and hence that his reading of life is necessarily different from that of the dramatists who write of other provinces. Weygandt expresses the idea in an important introductory chapter of Irish Plays and Playwrights. "The new Irish drama is more native in its stories than is the Elizabethan drama, as these stories, even when they are stories found in variant forms in other countries, are given the tone of Irish life. Synge, the master dramatist of the new movement, while he does not reproduce the average Irishman, is just as natively Irish in his extravagance and irony as the old folk-tale of the "Two Hags"; Lady Gregory in her farces is in a similar way representative of the riot of West country imagination; and Mr. Yeats, if farther removed from the Irishmen of to-day, is very life, in many of his moods to the riddling bards of long ago. The later men, many of them, are altogether Irish, representative of the folk of one or another section

of the country, Mr. Murray and Mr. Robinson of Cork, Mr. Mayne and Mr. Ervine of Down, Mr. Colum and Mr. Boyle of the Midlands."¹

Other critics almost invariably use the word or the idea "regional" in speaking of individual playwrights. Charles Tennyson, for instance, says: "Mr. Colum writes of central Ireland; and the passion and richness of the west find no place in his work. None the less it has a pronounced imaginative flavor and a fineness of vision which give distinction to his closely studied characters. The later realists have come from the north, east and south--Colum the middle dramatist forms a link with 'the naked sea-bitten provinces of the West where life is still simple and speech harmonious.'"² In the same strain Lloyd Morris says of Lennox Robinson, "He, too, is a regional playwright--it is of the southwest that he writes;" and of Maurice Harte, "It does for Catholic Ireland just what the plays of 'Rutherford Mayne' and St. John Ervine do for Protestant Ireland."³

This stock criticism of "regional realism" has arisen from a number of causes. One of the lesser reasons, no doubt, is that in attributing reality and "Irish-ness" of any degree

1. P. 14.

2. Quarterly Review, Vol. 215, pp. 219-241.

3. Celtic Dawn, p. 151.

it is always necessary to emphasize their locale as the West Coast and the bog-lands of County Wicklow where life is primitive and isolated, and the peasant, comparatively untouched by civilization, retains his Celtic extravagance and grotesquerie. It is natural that the same method of criticism should be carried over into discussion of later playwrights.

Another, and much more powerful cause, is in the general feeling that the North is entirely apart from the rest of Ireland. Ulster has for a long time seemed almost a foreign country in her relations with Connacht, Leinster, and Munster. The reason is not far to seek: the Scotch Presbyterian colonies which were "planted" in Ulster in the seventeenth and succeeding centuries have retained their racial and religious characteristics as the foreigners who invaded other parts of Ireland did not. Moreover, Ulster is an industrial province; her factories and shops and trade-unions are in striking contrast to the fields and dairies and peasant population of the south and west. Naturally, critics reason, a drama which is true of North Irish life will have little in common with that of the rest of the country.

Another factor in producing this insistence upon the unlikeness of the North Irish drama to that of the Abbey Theatre tradition may very likely be the attitude of Uladh, the official publication of the Ulster Literary Theatre which was established in 1904 with the avowed purpose of fostering a drama which

should be native to Ulster. A typical editorial of this little periodical is in the Samhain number, November 1904: "We recognize at the outset that our art of the drama will be different from that other Irish art of drama from the stage of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin, where two men, W. B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde, have set a model in Anglo-Irish and Gaelic plays with a success that is surprising and exhilarating. Dreamer, mystic, symbolist, Gaelic poet and propagandist have all spoken on the Dublin stage, and a fairly defined local school has been inaugurated. We in Belfast and Ulster also wish to set up a school; but there will be a difference. At present we can only say that our talent is more satiric than poetic. That will probably remain the broad difference between the Ulster and the Leinster schools." In 1904 this statement was reasonable enough. Even the semi-realistic peasant plays of Synge and Lady Gregory were very new in Dublin, their significance as turning points away from the poetic drama of legendary and folk life only half realized by Yeats himself. Robinson, Murray, Boyle, Seumas O'Kelly, and George Fitzmaurice had not yet begun to write their biting studies of the contemporary peasant. By 1915, however, as we have seen, the plays of the Abbey dramatists were as deeply realistic and as satiric as those of the Belfast group. Hence the critical dicta of those early numbers of Uladh are to be viewed to-day with a good deal of skepticism.

Finally, the distinct difference in dialect in the plays from different parts of the countries has helped to lead observers to regard the drama of the North almost as forming a separate school; has no doubt influenced writers like E. A. Boyd to isolate the plays of North Ireland from those of the other provinces. The language of the Ulster plays, with the exception of Ervine's which by its intensification and literal transcription seems something entirely new, has a strong resemblance to the staple "Irish dialect" which budding American story-writers put into the mouths of their Pats and Mikes. The speech of the southern peasants is patterned after Synge's Kiltartanese. To make the contrast clear passages may be cited from the two authors showing the most individual use of unlike dialects, Ervine and Fitzmaurice.

Here is a characteristic speech from Mixed Marriage:
Mrs. Rainey: "Me an' my man has had our ups and downs, an' he's a bit domineerin', but A think A'd do it again if A had me life over again. They don't ondherstan' weemen...but ye git to ondherstan' them soon enough. Ye know, they're quare oul' humbugs when ye know them. Och, dear, the're jus' like big childher. When Hughie wus a chile, he wus quare an' strong. There wus times afore he cud walk whin A cud har'ly houl' him, he wud twist about in me arms that much... It was sore work sometimes, an' his da nivir seemed to ondherstan' that A got tired out."

The two following short speeches quoted to show the dialectal method of Fitzmaurice are from the last scene of The Country Dressmaker:

Matt: It's a lonesome evening you will have of it surely. But if I overtake the ruffian, Clohesy, it's a welt for a welt I'll get or call me a coward and a shame to my clan for the rest of my days."

Norry: You have your will now. You have your will. The dark house behind in Lyre will be our doom. Tisn't the friends and neighbors will be about us in our latter end and we drawing the last breath, but it's in a cold place we'll be among strangers. A plain coffin they'll make for us and there will be no thought of us at all and we going to our long home. You have your will now.

No nice discrimination is required to see the difference in the two uses of dialect just quoted. It is there in too bald outlines to be missed by anyone. What is not so easily noticed, however, is the very distinct differences between the dialects of plays dealing with the same part of the country. Mayne, of whose plays Boyd says, "The speech, setting and acting combine to impress upon the spectator the peculiar character of the Ulsterman and his environment,"¹ uses a dialect which is remarkably flexible. The outraged words of Mrs. Granahan upon the bargaining of William John sound very like Ervine: "Fine hunnert houn', and after me tellin' him to keep til four hunnert. Wail til I git ahoul't of him again.

1. Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 178.

I'll speak til him. Did he no hear me thumpin' four times on the door til remind him?"¹ But the well-known last speech of Grandfather Granahan in the same play is of another sort: "D'ye think them proud city folk will listen to his poor ould ballads with the heart of the boy singing through them? It's only us--it's only us, I say, as knows the long wild nights and the wet and the rain and the mists of nights on the bog-lands--it's only us, I say, could listen to him in the right way. And ye knowed, right well ye knowed, that every string of his fiddle was keyed to the crying of your own heart." This might have been written by Fitzmaurice or Murray--or even by Synge. If it expresses the North it is not far off the mark of the South and the West.

A similar study of the dialect employed by Fitzmaurice and Murray, who are in every way the masters of Leinster speech, would reveal as striking differences. The passage from The Country Dressmaker quoted in a recent paragraph is not so different from Murray, but the words and the tumbling rhythms of many other typical speeches of Fitzmaurice are no more like Murray and Robinson than Ervine. A speech selected almost at random from The Pie-Dish illustrates the difference: "Isn't that queer for you, black Mage, and you knowing our sow has bonnives, a big straak of hay down on us and the servant girl

1. The Turn of the Road.

after hoisting her sails? Is there no credit due to me to be endangering my life coming here this roasting day, and he no loss in course, the poor old man, in comparison with me or the likes of me, the mother of a huge family?"

Robinson's language in The Clancy Name and The White-headed Boy differs no more from Mayne's than from that of his fellow Dubliners. Indeed there is a notable dialectal difference in the two plays themselves. A passage typical of Robinson's early use of the peasant speech may be quoted from The Clancy Name.

Eugene: I always say that the day James Clancy died wasn't the worst day for his widow.

Mrs. Spillane: You're right, Eugene, though it's a hard thing to be saying in this house. Poor James Clancy--God rest his soul!--a kind man, and a good man, but not much of a man on a farm.

Eugene: Not much indeed, but a nice little ball of a man and a Clancy every inch of him.

Mrs. Spillane: Herself's more of a Clancy if you ask me. What with pride and management, and good farming--'t isn't every woman would battle it out the way she did--and I'm thinking Eugene, if we'd asked a bigger interest of her we'd have got it.

Eugene: Ah well, well, you wouldn't be hard on a neighbor in trouble; and she was a stiff one to drive a bargain with. Maybe you don't remember the day and she dressed in black and her hands trembling with the fear of the farm being sold over her head, and for all her fears, and for all her black, divil a bit would she give us only five per cent.

Mrs. Spillane: Sure I remember. Well, indeed,
I don't grudge it to her, her farm is
a credit to the parish.

The following passage from The White-headed Boy is
Robinson in another mood. One could never mistake the dialogue
here for Murray or Fitzmaurice.

George: I won't have an easy minute till the
pair of them are married and gone. Oh
Donough, it's an awful thing to be head
of a family. Since the father died
I've not had a minute's rest, pulled
this way and that way, this one wanting
to get married, another going into
business, Baby flying up to Dublin,
Denis doctoring--many a time I wished
I was born an orphan.

Aunt Ellen: God forgive you.

George: It's true, Aunt Ellen. Look at the life
I've led between you all, and no one ever
thinking maybe I'd want to get married,
or have a bit of fun, or spend a bit of
money. For two pins I'd throw the lot
of ye over to-morrow and sail away out
of this for ever.

Aunt Ellen: Yerra, talk sense, George; that's
no way to be behaving.

George: There's no escape for me. I'm caught
like an old cow with her head in a stall.

When one turns to the plays of the Midlands one finds
varying dialects again. Colum's and Boyle's use of peasant
speech are greatly unlike in both words and rhythms. Do not
the two following passages, the first from The Fiddler's House
and the second from The Family Failing, show a striking contrast
of language?

Conn: God help them that are depending on the land and the weather for the bit they put into their heads. It's no wonder that the people here are the sort they are, harassed, anxious people.

Anne: The people here mind their own business and they're a friendly people besides.

Conn: People that would leave the best fiddler at the fair to go look at a bullock.

Anne: He's not satisfied to have this shelter, Brian.

Conn: (to Brian) It's small blame to the girl here for thinking something of the place; but I saw the time, Brian MacConnell, when I could make more playing at one fair than working a whole season in this bit of a place.

Brian: Girls like the shelter, Conn.

Conn: Ay, but the road for the fiddler. I'm five years settled here, and I come to be as well known as the begging ass, and there is as much thought about me. Fiddling, let me tell you, isn't like a boy's whistling. It can't be kept up on nothing.

The following is typical of Boyle's racing comedy:

Joe: There's something up! They're running!
What the dickens--
(Nelty runs in breathless.)

Nelty: The cow! Come quick! the whole of you!

Maria: What's the matter, Nelty?

Nelty: The cow!--in a bog-hole drownding. She was craning, the starved creature, for a mouthful, and the bank slipped in an-under her. Drowned she'll be, no less, if yous don't hurry.

Dominic: After all our effort--Maria, this is terrible.

Nelty: Isn't the Old Sack going to stir himself:

Look alive! The devil pull you.
(Drags Dominic by the arm.) Up! Out
of this, you turf stack!

The fact would seem to be that underneath all these varying idioms and superficial dissimilarities there is after all a great deal in common. The Irishman of to-day can perhaps be understood only imperfectly from the work of any single realist; he exists in his full proportions as he is drawn detail by detail, trait by trait, dialect by dialect in all of the plays. Even the great difference in dialect noted in the Ulster and Kerry plays of Ervine and Fitzmaurice is no greater than the difference in the speech of a Kentucky mountaineer and an Illinois farmer who lives not a great many miles distant. Yet we never think of calling either of these men un-American or of insisting that they are fundamentally unlike.

So settled, however, is this feeling of the essential uniqueness of Ulster drama that Boyd says emphatically: "The regionalism of the Northern dramatists corresponds to a definite condition of Irish geography..... The Ulster playwrights are entitled to be considered apart from their Southern contemporaries, even when they have not been identified specifically with the literary movement in Belfast. Satirical humor seems to be the dominant characteristic of the Ulster group."¹ Throughout the chapter whenever he has praise for these northern playwrights, it is for "preserving the atmosphere of Ulster."

1. Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 170.

But is the atmosphere so different? There is pure comedy, and satiric comedy in the South and Midlands as well. Excluding The Building Fund, all of Boyle's plays are satiric comedies. Robinson's popular The White-headed Boy is likewise in the satiric vein; The Country Dressmaker and the fantasy Dandy Dolls are full of humorous satire; of all the southern group only Murray is entirely free from this trait which has so often been ascribed as the outstanding characteristic of the Ulster playwrights. On the other hand, the Ulster dramatists are not without their poetry. Brian Hobson's Brian of Banba, James Cousin's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Lewis Purcell's The Pagan, and Joseph Campbell's The Little Cowherd of Slainge are by way of exceptions to the general realistic work of the northern playwrights as Padraic Pearse's plays of early Ireland and Fitzmaurice's fantasies Dandy Dolls and Magic Glasses are to the realism of the Dublin writers. And in justice one must admit that The Little Cowherd of Slainge is as truly in the Yeatsian tradition as are Pearse's little dramatic dialogues which aim to stir patriotic feeling--and a great deal more like Yeats than are Dandy Dolls and Magic Glasses, which have a large flavor of the grotesque because of their dealing with present day peasants who act like the folk of ancient time. Yeats, as we have seen, consistently refused to consider the modern peasant as a fit subject for the folk drama of imagination. Finally, as regards the spirit of the new Irish drama, tragedy

is certainly limited to no regional group of writers. Mayne's The Troth and Red Turf are full of the same violent feeling for which The Birthright has been criticised; John Ferguson and Mixed Marriage are as truly tragic as The Moonlighters, Thomas Muskerri, The Shuiler's Child, or any other of the best tragedies of the new Irish drama.

But, say the critics, Ulster is Protestant and Unionist, the rest of Ireland Catholic and Nationalist. To be true to the life of the different parts of the country the drama should show this difference; the plays of the South should flame with patriotic and nationalist feeling, while those of the North should reflect an opposite spirit. To a certain extent that is exactly the case. The dramatic dialogues of Padraic Pearse are weighted with an agonized protest at the apathy of the nation; in them gleams that clear love of country which was to cost the author his life in the cause of Irish freedom. The mention of Pearse always brings to mind Thomas MacDonagh, who was killed in the Easter uprising. His single well-known play, When the Dawn is Come, contrasts with Pearse's in pleading his cause against a dull nation by telling, not of past uprisings, but of the successful one which is to come in the future. Fitzmaurice's Moonlighters is a dramatization of the reaction of an old man who has been a staunch Fenian in '86 to the rebellious plans of the young men about him whom he distrusts as blackguards because of their noisy talk about

Nationalism. When he realizes that most of them are sincere, he goes out to die with one of them.

Robinson has three plays dealing with this passion of Irishmen for independence: The Dreamers and The Lost Leader, studies of the national heroes, Emmet and Parnell, and The Patriot, a play charged with a pessimistic feeling that Irish blood no longer runs red, that Irish spirit is no longer heroic. Its satire is double, one point directed toward the old style rebels who brought misery to themselves and their families without accomplishing their end, and the other toward the new reformist methods which in 1912 seemed to have vitiated prosperous modern Ireland. Thus Ann Nugent, who from a passionately devoted bride has been hardened into an intensely practical business woman during her husband's imprisonment, cries out: "Oh don't talk to me of patriotism--I'm sick of it. It's made Sullivan a bankrupt; it's made Brennan a drunkard; you a murderer; it's destroyed my happiness; it's made Rose a cripple... your mad patriotic selfishness." On the other hand there is a warning against the men who have grown away from Nugent's Brand-like patriotism; who say with Father Kearney: "Give it up, James. It was very good fun twenty years ago when we were all young and felt that life was a desperately serious thing, and that Ireland would sink under the sea if we didn't cut her free from England. But we are older now, and more sensible, and we feel that things are gradually working right."

When one turns to the plays of the northern group which deal with political subjects, the contrast at first seems overwhelmingly great. Here the satire is all directed towards the fatal weakness of Ulster, the bigotry which is fed by English politicians and by industrialist propaganda. The attitude of the typical Ulsterite is in the righteously indignant explosion of Aunt Marget in Purcell's The Enthusiast: "What else cud ye expect but a fight, bringin' Home Rulers an' Catholics and Dippers an' tramps, an' a' the riff-raffs o' the country into the same field. It's flyin' in the face o' Providence." It is this entire lack of feeling of national solidarity which is satirized in the Ulster plays. Gerald MacNamara gets a great deal of slightly bitter fun in delineating Thompson, a typical North peasant whose stock of Irish historical knowledge consists of the facts that King William crossed the Boyne in 1690 and that King Henry VIII. was a "Roman" till he was converted; who defines the enemies of the country as "peelers", although he admits that they are to be tolerated because "they're useful sometimes for putting down them terrible atrocities in the South and West."

The themes of The Enthusiast, Mixed Marriage, and The Orangeman have already been spoken of as being identical: the revolt of youth against the bigotry of its environment. Superficially this theme has little in common with the fervently patriotic plays of the South. And yet is not the underlying

motive for all of these plays practically the same as the motive for the Abbey plays--the author's desire for a unified Ireland? There is nationalism equal to any Dublin enthusiast's in Michael O'Connor's passionate efforts to unite "Cathliks and Prodesan" and in his feeling that personal happiness is to be sacrificed to his cause. "It's Irelan' agin you. Irelan''s a bigger thing nor you an' Hugh an' me an' all o' us rowled thegither." The patriotic spirit of the North is in these young men who rebel against the hard intolerance and short-sightedness of Ulster. One of the best expressions of this feeling is in the words of James McKinstry (The Enthusiast) who has tried to persuade his neighbors to transcend their religious and political differences by entering into a co-operative farming movement. When he returns from the resulting fray, battered and disillusioned, he says sadly, "And to think they are so blind that they lose sight of their true interests and stone their friends for the sake of a meaningless catch-word." The more one studies these northern plays the more one is convinced that after all their spirit is in fundamental harmony with that of the other contemporary Irish plays. The thrust against Ulster separatist disposition is too sharp and too universal to admit of any interpretation but a love of country as deep and as clear-eyed as that which animates the other Irish realists. Both groups of writers struggle against the dull apathy or hot wrong-headedness which they see about them. Only the

conditions causing these popular qualities differ. In Ulster it is religious bigotry; in Leinster and Connacht, it is lack of proper educational system and too great a pre-occupation with the business of building prosperous farms. But the essentials are not in such great contrast as at first appeared.

Again, if "regional realism" is so characteristic of the recent plays as most critics have insisted and as one who reads newspaper accounts of riots and civil war would naturally suppose, differences in character-types should be so outstanding as to be unmistakable. Surely here at least will be contrasting human qualities which may explain the animosity of the orange and green wearers.

If one had read the peasant plays of only Synge and Lady Gregory and should then come to these stories of Ulster Presbyterians, one would undoubtedly feel himself in a new world. The Scotch-Irishman with his complacent consciousness of being a pillar in the church and his canny ability to get on by the simple formulae of watching the pennies and preserving himself a respectable figure is widely removed from Synge's tinkers and tramps and Lady Gregory's quaint villagers. But if one attempts to compare this same Scotch-Irishman with characters from other realistic plays striking parallels are immediately evident. Enough has been said in preceding chapters to prepare for the statement which might otherwise seem a bit startling that there is scarcely a type of character in any

play which is not closely paralleled in the plays of another section of the country. Some of the most interesting of these recurring types may be discussed briefly.

Many of them have already been mentioned. For instance the shiftless Irishman who gives himself up to idle dreaming until he is utterly worthless except as ornamental furnishing of life, as pictured in Uncle Daniel Murray, Dominic Donnelly, and Denis Geoghegan, has been discussed for his prosiness. But for the present point at issue the significant thing about this trilogy is the fact that they hail from Ulster, the Midlands, and County Cork respectively. There is nothing about any of these triflers to prevent their being interchanged. Denis, to be sure, is partly forgiveable for his youth and personal charm, but give him fifteen years and the moral responsibility of someone dependent upon him and he will be as despicable as Dominic Donnelly, unless his right-about-face at the end of the play is more thorough-going than we are apt to give him credit for.

Similarly in discussing the "hard farmer" considerable time was spent upon William James Granahan, John Murray, Murtagh Cosgar, Dan Fogarty, Maurice Hurley, and Bat Morrissey. Is it necessary to point out the fact that these characters are equally distributed among our "regional" groups? Blind love of the land and of prosperity is the same powerful motive in Catholic old Timothy Hurley as in Sunday-School teacher William

James Granahan. It inspires one to commit arson and the other to cheat his neighbors and outrage his own paternal instincts. Three other fathers, one from each broad division of Ireland, are also guilty of parental tyranny of the grossest sort, John Rainey, Murtagh Cosgar and Bat Morrissey. Each is equally obstinate, equally blind to his own best interests, equally violent, and in the end equally deserving of our pity. Change Rainey's environment from the Belfast ship-yards to an Ulster farm and his violent bigotry would shade off into a love of the land which will be exactly the same force in his life as that which motivates Cosgar and Morrissey. We know this because the Ulster farmers, the Granahan men except Robbie John, the McKinstry father and son, John Murray and the McMinns, and Ebenezer McKie, are as deeply attached to the soil as any Leinster peasant could possibly be.

If the fathers of Ireland seem curiously alike in these plays there is a no less important resemblance in many of the mothers. As examples of the women who spend untold energy in smoothing off the roughnesses of their men folks and in mediating in their quarrels compare Mrs. Rainey, Mrs. Morrissey and Mrs. Crilly. Throughout the plays these women are on a constant strain of trying to soothe their hot-tempered, much-demanding men. Like Mrs. Rainey, they are all "patient with the awful patience of a woman who has always submitted to her husband's will, without ever respecting him." But

even Mrs. Rainey grows tired of her life of perpetual peace-making and exclaims: "Aw, there's times when a wumman's sick o' men an' their folly. Can't ye go through the wurl' without hammerin' wan another like bastes o' the field?" Maura Morrissey rushes between her sons to prevent their violence and when the trouble is temporarily averted, pleads distractedly with first one then the other of them: "Whist, whist, for God's sake! Let us have no more words this blessed night. Say your prayers and go to bed, the two of ye, in the name of God. 'Tis very late. Won't you, Shane? Won't you, Hugh?" Mrs. Crilly, Thomas Muskerri's daughter, almost seems to sum up the feeling of a vast group of Irishwomen, whether from the North or South, when she says, "I have to make bits of myself to mind everything and be prepared for everything."

On the other hand a type of woman entirely different from Mrs. Rainey and Mrs. Morrissey is found in the plays of each "region". Is there any essential unlikeness in Sarah McMinn, Mrs. Grogan, and Mrs. Clancy? Each is cunning, domineering, and avaricious. One feels that they would be equally unpleasant to live with. Other women who bear marked resemblance to each other are Mrs. Harte, Mrs. Cather, and Mrs. Mulroy. They all use the old argument of the child's duty toward the family to force him to do what his conscience disapproves of. Maurice Harte is tender enough to accede to his mother's wishes; Kitty Mulroy submits without much protest to

her betrothal to a middle aged man whom she despises, but she is relieved of her promise by circumstances; Maggie Cather, whose nature has been toughened by her years of suffering, stands out stoutly against Mrs. Cather. None of these mothers are despicable. They are only weak--weak enough to bend morally when harassed too much. One feels that Ervine's characterization of Mrs. Ferguson is an apt description of all of them: "She is not a very intelligent woman, and so her sympathies are sometimes flattened by her lack of perception, but, within her limitations, she is an excellent wife and mother."

While Irish girlhood is not treated as intensively as adult womanhood, even in the somewhat sketchy characterizations which are given, it is impossible not to note the recurrence of types in plays of different provinces. Mary Murray in The Drone, Mary Crilly in Thomas Muskerrey, Min Delane in The Country Dressmaker, Sheila in The Building Fund, and Delia Duffy, Denis Geoghegan's sweetheart, are all alike in being alert, pretty, not too intelligent, scheming minxes with a strong dash of the flirtatious in their natures. They will develop, one feels, into wives and mothers "excellent, within their limitations". Nora O'Connor in Mixed Marriage is, perhaps, the outstanding example of a girl who puts her love above everything else, but Anne Hourican, a Midland's girl, and Julia, the sentimental dressmaker of Fitzmaurice's comedy, are not far behind her in their clinging to love in the face

of obstacles. On the other hand Maire Hourican, Ellen Douras, and Ellen McCarthy, also from different parts of the country, place other aspirations above love.

The maternal passion of Mrs. Ferguson in the affecting scene when Andrew declares he must confess is equalled by the love of Moll Woods' in O'Kelly's The Shuiler's Child which flames into the cry, "Where am I to turn... I could face hardships unfearing with the child.... What does a child signify to a woman if it is not the grace of God?"; and in the desperation of childless Nannie when the Shuiler's child is taken from her. It is noteworthy here that the two women vagabonds who appear in the new Irish drama, one, Peg Straw, is from the extreme North in the Donegal mountain country, and the other, Moll Woods, from the extreme south, Cork County.

There remain to be mentioned a few other analogies of character which are surely very striking in plays whose realism is only "regional". The three young men who are most truly in love have already been discussed--Hugh Rainey, Matt Cosgar, and Owen Morrissey--one from each part of the country. The exceptional Irishman to whom art is more than comfort, more than the land, more than life, is also, curiously enough, portrayed in three men from Ulster, the Midlands, and County Kerry. Robbie John Granahan is a mere youngster, Conn Hourican in the prime of his life, and Lem Donohue (in The Pie-Dish) a very old man. In spite of their varying years, they behave strangely

alike. Robbie John leaves home, love, and sure, comfortable livelihood to develop the musical gift which is his. Conn Hourican says thoughtfully as he bids farewell to an old age of ease and comfort, "I'm leaving the land behind me; but what's the land after all against the music that comes from the far, strange places, when the night is on the ground and the bird in the grass is quiet?" One cannot but think that when life is over they, like Lem Donohue, will bargain salvation for the opportunity to finish their artistic labor, if it is not already completed. There is no essential difference in these three men who are such unusual figures in the realistic peasant drama. As a final reminder that recent playwrights do not see Irish life as something which changes radically with province boundaries, attention may be called to the three old men of the new drama, Grandfather Granahan, Uncle Bartle of The Mineral Workers, and Lem Donohue, charming characters all of them, with a singularly similar philosophy of the homely wisdom that comes from long years of observation.

Parallels of this sort could be multiplied to far greater length, but surely enough has been said to prove the contention that the term "regional realism" as applied to new Irish drama is only half true. No just critic could feel that there are no differences in the plays of the different provinces--it has been the purpose of this chapter to show, not that there is no "regional realism", but that this phrase,

which has so lightly passed from one critic to another, exaggerates the differences which do undoubtedly exist. In conclusion, it is but fair to Weygandt to quote a few sentences in which he sums up the similarities, after stressing the dissimilarities of Irish life. "And yet, definite as are these distinctions, life in various parts of Ireland seems much alike, class for class, as it is represented by many contemporaneous playwrights, whether the scenes of their plays are Down or Kerry, Galway or Wicklow. A tinker is a tinker wherever you find him, a strong farmer a strong farmer, a landlord a landlord."¹ How true these words are we have seen. It is only to be regretted that they are so carelessly thrown into a chapter which otherwise insists throughout upon "regional realism."

1. Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 216.

CHAPTER V.

LENNOX ROBINSON AND ST. JOHN ERVINE.

In any study of a literary school there is always danger of seeming to lump the group of writers into a level mass with no figures of outstanding merit. In order to avoid this risk of false perspective it seems, therefore, advisable, if not absolutely necessary, to discuss at some length the two playwrights whose work has received most wide-spread notice. Anyone who has read the dramatic criticism of books, magazines, and daily press during the last seven years knows at once what names will be selected--Lennox Robinson and St. John Ervine. Mayne's two plays, The Turn of the Road and The Drone are among the best comedies in the whole field of modern drama. Murray's two tragedies, The Birthright and Maurice Harte, particularly the latter, are as impressive in their simplicity and dignified realism as anything that Robinson and Ervine have done. But neither Mayne nor Murray have since the Great War swept down upon Europe done anything to develop their art. In the work of both Robinson and Ervine, however, there has been a steady development, and they are writing constantly. For Mayne and Murray playwriting has been only a passing avocation; their real professions are, respectively, acting and teaching. Robinson and Ervine are writers by profession,

and thus have to their credit many more significant plays than the two each by which the other men are best known. Hence, it is, on every account, proper to choose these men who by the quantity and quality of their dramatic output and by their managership of the Abbey Theatre are most significant among the Irish realists.

Lennox Robinson was born in Cork, October 4, 1886. His father was a clergyman whose charges were always in the Southwest of Ireland, consequently Robinson understands the life of County Cork as thoroughly as do Murray and the novelist Daniel Corkery, whose Yellow Bittern has been so popular on Irish stages. Writing seems to have fascinated him from his boyhood, for while yet a mere youngster he edited an amateur magazine. We have it on the authority of Weygandt that it was a visit of the Abbey Theatre company to Cork which first turned Robinson's thought toward the drama, which was in those days (1907 or 1908) the great literary activity of Ireland. We know, however, that there was a Dramatic Society in Cork, and it is probable that Robinson was interested in playwriting before he saw the famous group of Abbey actors. At any rate, his first play The Clancy Name was presented in the Abbey when he was barely twenty-two.

In the thirteen years since that time his life has been full of literary work. Six plays, a novel which had to

be rewritten because the original manuscript was burned during the bombardment of Dublin in the Easter uprising, a volume of short stories, and many articles for literary periodicals have been published over his name. In addition to his work as an author, Robinson has been busy with the task of building up Irish rural libraries, and as director of the Abbey Theatre has traveled and lectured extensively besides struggling heroically to rebuild the company after the demoralization of the war. Surely a busy thirteen years!

Excluding The White-headed Boy, Robinson plays fall naturally into two groups, the earlier one comprising those written before 1912 and having for a theme some social condition in Ireland. In this list are The Clancy Name, The Cross-Roads, and The Harvest, all three of which have been mentioned often in former chapters. The other group began with The Patriots in 1912 and deals with political themes--with Ireland as a nation trying to discover its destiny. Besides The Patriots this group includes The Dreamers, first produced in 1915, just a year before the Easter up-rising, and The Lost Leader in 1919. Robinson's single comedy, The White-headed Boy, which, because it is so unlike his other work, must be classed by itself, had its premiere at the end of 1916, and has been on the boards almost ever since.

The Clancy Name, although melodramatic and lacking Robinson's later mastery of prolonged suspense, is really a remarkable first play. The delineation of Mrs. Clancy's

character and the grasp on dialect are scarcely improved in the later plays; the compactness and singleness of tragic effect are in every way admirable. Moreover, this first play struck Robinson's characteristic vein: a keen sense of the irony of human ambition. On the very day when Mrs. Clancy pays off her mortgage and feels that at last the family name which she idolizes is to be free from all stain of disrespect, she discovers that her only son is a murderer. In this little one-act piece there is real tragic effect, a notable achievement for so young a writer as Robinson was at that time. One probably still more unusual is the artistic compression which could crowd into one speech so much of character, dialect, past history, theme, and atmosphere as are in one which Mrs. Clancy utters early in the play: "Well, I've got you here to-day to pay you back the money I borrowed from you five years ago when the Lisless bank broke and my husband lost all his money. He was always sickly and the shock of losing his money and the disgrace killed him altogether. So there was I, left without a penny, and a whole bag of debts. There's many a woman would have sold the farm and paid what she could and rested content all her life, but I couldn't do that. 'Twas never said before that a Clancy couldn't pay his debts."

From the promising beginning of The Clancy Name Robinson passed to more ambitious attempts in The Cross-Roads and The Harvest, three act plays which appeared in 1909 and

1910. Neither of them, it must be admitted, lives up to the expectation created by The Clancy Name. Both are melodramatic; both are so obviously propagandistic in tone that they remind one of Brioux at his worst; and somehow both fail to be convincing. Yet they have not lacked critics who praise them highly. Thus Weygandt insists that "after the needless prologue" of The Cross-Roads "it is fine art through to the end,"¹ and that the reading of the Irish peasant in Tom Dempsey, severe though it be, is not distorted.

Attention has been called in previous paragraphs to most of the faults of The Cross-Roads: its melodramatic exaggeration of Tom Dempsey's brutality; the incredible supposition that Ellen's loveless marriage has put a black curse not only upon herself and her husband but upon the farm until the stock dies of disease, the hens refuse to lay, and the land loses its productivity; the lack of unified impression caused by the glaring contrast of Ellen in the first and last scenes might also have been emphasized. These things, which in reading one dismisses as improbable, do not, however, so greatly affect the spectators many of whom report that they were carried away by the play, feeling it a poignant, human tragedy of a soul which misunderstood values. This attitude of those who have seen the play shows, as nothing else could, that no matter what other artistic sense Robinson may lose momentarily, his feeling for stage effect never slips.

1. Irish Plays and Playwrights, p. 224.

Two other characteristics of Robinson are noticeable in this early play. First, it is typical of his ability to choose a theme which is fundamental in Irish life--a more impassioned protest has not been written against the loveless marriage system of Ireland than this play contains. The theme is so truly great, that one mourns any but perfect treatment. The second characteristic is the irony which runs through all of Robinson's work. In this play it appears in the failure of Ellen to create happiness or even prosperity for herself when the up-to-date methods she advocates are all the time enriching her neighbors and making her community known even in Dublin as progressive. After all, The Cross-Roads does not measure up so far below the apprentice plays of many a dramatist whose mature work holds secure claim to greatness.

In The Harvest there is a notable improvement in dramatic technique. Here the impression is thoroughly unified and the action condensed into three weeks. While its peasant figures lack the excessive brutality of Tom Dempsey, it is in some respects the most naturalistic of Robinson's plays. Environment and hereditary weakness and especially educational training have made the Hurley young people what they are; no particular guilt is attached to them in their failure to help their father. If we grant the author's premise, we are inclined to condone even the crime of old Timothy, so indignant are we at the educational system which has caused all the

trouble. But we have a canny suspicion that Lennox Robinson may be writing of life that he knows little of, for there is weakness in The Harvest, a failure to convince which none of the other plays has in like degree. After watching the father of the Hurleys fire his property in order to defraud the insurance company, we do not believe that the educational system is all that is affecting the young Hurleys; we fail to thrill to Mary's blase defiance; we doubt that a young peasant would have been so soon weakened physically as Jack is; and our common sense prompts us to think it highly improbable that in a family of six children not one would be able and willing to rescue the old homestead--that of the lot who were felt to be so promising, not one except Maurice who has stayed on the farm is more than self-supporting. This feeling that the characters are only pawns which Robinson has used to prove his point causes Weygandt, recalling the fact that while writing The Harvest Robinson spent some time in England with Shaw and Barker, to exclaim, "It is but another of many illustrations of the blight that Mr. Shaw has brought upon the modern English stage."

One must admit, however, that the play is readable. There are interesting touches of characterization, flashes of humor, and above all Robinson's own irony which go far toward redeeming the play from utter triviality. One of the best endings of any modern drama is in this one. The situation

has resolved itself: Timothy is to draw his insurance money; Jack has given up his idealistic struggle in disgust; Mary is going back to her shameful life in London; Patrick has changed his name and religion. But William Lordan, the old school master who has mis-trained them all, knowing nothing of the seamy side of the story of his former pupils, congratulates himself upon what he has done for them and plans similar careers for bright pupils now in his school. "May God grant me a few more years of health and strength till I do with them what I've done with Mary and Patrick," he prays complacently.

With the appearance of The Patriots in 1912, a new epoch in Robinson's dramatic career began. As has been said, it is the dramatization of the Irish political spirit which a few years later found expression in the Sinn Fein movement. In both technique and theme it set the form of all the later plays except The White-headed Boy. It is difficult to speak of this play in any but enthusiastic terms. The action is closely knit; there is a constant tightening of interest and a sense of inevitability; a balance and completeness which many of the plays of the realists do not have; above all one finds a mixture of pathos and humor which is masterly. The characterization is sure, even in the minor persons. The two fussy old uncles, Ann's brothers, are clearly presented and stand out delightfully against the stereotyped figures of Robinson's earlier plays. The author's keenest satire finds expression

in the speech of Uncle Bob: "I'd have had the country in a flame only for my wretched health. But I done what I could. I done what I could. It's no joke being secretary to the League, I can tell you. Why, getting up these winter lectures is a big job in itself, and there are always resolutions to be framed and addresses, and--and people like Starkie to pacify--oh, it's very wearing. I sometimes think if I had withdrawn from it altogether I might have got back my health. But I'll never withdraw. I've given my life willingly--for Ireland. Isn't that cocoa ready?"

The political interest of the play is, however, only half of it. The turning of Ann from an ardent bride to a hardened business woman is real human drama. "You wooed me passionately, you married me passionately and for five years you dragged me after you round the country kindling my patriotism at the flame of yours, speaking through me with your passion. I was never myself in all those years. I was only you. You took my health, my strength, my beauty, my money, and you spent them prodigally, and at twenty-six I found myself old and ugly and grey and worn out--it's no use. You can't kindle me again. I suppose I'm too old."

But the supreme character of the drama is, of course, Nugent himself, the old fire-brand who has hoarded his strength through his eighteen prison years that he may be of use to "the cause", and now comes out to find that the cause is dead, his former comrades occupied with lectures and luke-warm

petitions, and his wife able to say dispassionately, "I think I hate you, James." But the crowning feature of his tragedy is his final realization that his consecration to Ireland has been fruitless of anything but evil. Eighteen years in prison could not break his spirit, but the disillusion of his first days at home transform him into an old man, "a thing to be told stories about." It is characteristic of Robinson to follow Nugent's last broken speech with a remark from the relieved janitor that now since the patriotic meeting is not to be held, he can go to the pictures after all.

Hester Travers Smith, writing in The Drama for April 1921, sums up the merits of The Patriots as "a masterpiece from the technical point of view. It is far less the drama of situation than the plays which followed it. It has fine proportions, it has humor which never descends to farce, and it has knowledge of human character."

The political feeling with which The Patriots is pregnant finds expression in Robinson's next play also. Here again the playwright takes no partisan stand and satirizes the enthusiast almost as keenly as his leaden followers. The Dreamers is a dramatization of the closing episodes of Robert Emmet's life; the failure of the national hero is presented as in large measure due to the futility and untrustworthiness of his followers. The excitement and confusion of despair are borne home to the spectator who sees the last tragic scenes

from the fringe of the crowd which gathers about Emmet. Emmet himself is portrayed in a way which in no respect suggests a portrait, if one is to accept the historical account of him as true.

With the exception of the love-scenes, which are clumsily enough done, the play is well-written throughout, and shows Robinson's unusual ability to handle an exceedingly difficult dramatic situation. There is nothing amateurish about the way the plot is built or in the method by which the central figure is presented.

Chronologically, The White-headed Boy is the next of Robinson's plays. Although he says we are to regard it as having political significance, it is never considered in that light. It is clever, high-spirited, entertaining comedy with decidedly broad humor. The slightness of the plot is at least partly compensated for by the carefulness with which it is worked out, and by the clearness of the characterization. Enough has been said of this very popular comedy in preceding paragraphs so that it may now be passed over with the appreciative comment of E. A. Boyd, who has been exceedingly chary of praise for the whole group of Irish realists: "The strength of this play undoubtedly lies in the perfect combination of form and content, and the natural, unstrained drollery of speech combined with a subject which develops realistically and logically, yet whose humor is that of cumulative effect.

There is not a deliberately manufactured phrase in it, not one situation that is forced and stagey, for the whole comedy arises out of the relations which inevitably establish themselves between the characters."¹ But for all that, one has reason to doubt that comedy is Robinson's real medium. His attitude toward life is too serious and his temperament too gauntly that of an artist who longs for better days to allow him to be satisfied with comedy of the type of The White-headed Boy.

Robinson's last play, The Lost Leader, was produced in the same season as Drinkwater's Abraham Lincoln and created almost as much of public sensation and critical dissension. It deals with the return of Ireland's "lost leader," dramatizing the legend that Parnell did not die, but merely retired to peaceful seclusion to wait until his country should need him again. The plot is briefly this: a psycho-analyst on a vacation in a remote Irish village playfully experiments with a London journalist, also on a vacation. A strange old peasant, Lucius Lenihan, who is in the room, is hypnotized along with the journalist, and the scientist, seeing in him a "subject" questions him--bringing back to him memories which had been buried. When in the course of the questioning he is asked his name he replies clearly and proudly, "Charles Stewart Parnell." According to Rebecca West the pronunciation of

1. Introduction to The White-headed Boy.

these words sent a thrill through London audiences such as they had not felt in our generation of play-going. The lost leader, now restored to his consciousness, prepares to deliver his message to Ireland, but before he can get it out, he is killed by a hurly stick thrown by a singer at a sneering gombeen man. When the men who have been called to identify the man as Parnell arrive, they cannot decide. "Is that Parnell? It might be-- I don't know" is as definite as they can be.

It is this failure of Robinson to say what he actually believes about the peasant-Parnell which has caused most of the contention among critics. Archer says emphatically: "To the end--such is the author's delicate art, we do not know which theory is the true one. In our hearts, however, under the glamour of the scene, we have not the least doubt that Lucius is the real Parnell." On the other hand Massingham of the London Nation criticizes the play for its end: "In shrinking from the full assumption on which the drama hangs, Lenihan's identity with the lost leader, its author lets the true problem--the psychological one--go and condemns his work to unreality." To the other stock criticism of the play that the views of the revived Parnell are not those which the real man held, Lucius himself answers, "Do you expect me to speak as I did twenty-five years ago--to forget nothing, to learn nothing? Do you expect Ireland to change and me to stand still?"

The play is, like Robinson's other plays, carefully planned and executed. It illustrates, however, the great weakness of Robinson as an artist--his predilection for political rather than universal human drama. He is a master of stage-craft. That he knows how to do personal drama of a kind which is rare, we must admit when we remember the personal phase of all his dramas. He has keen and unfaltering sense of dramatic situation. He is perfectly able to fit words and ideas to distinctive characters; he has the artist's aloofness from life. His only great dramatic fault is too great an interest in causes which necessarily makes his work transient and territorial in their appeal. He is still young, and if he learns to write "the still sad music of humanity" instead of the romance of political issues, he will be a truly great dramatist.

St. John Greer Ervine was born in Belfast in 1883, three years before Robinson's birth. Like most young writers who have not yet been honored with a biography, the details of his early life are shadowy. But even if he was not, as Weygandt declares, the son of a shipyards workingman, it is certain that as a lad he played about the yards, making a child's shrewd observations and learning to know the spirit of Belfast working classes. He early began to read omnivorously and, like Robinson, to experiment with writing while yet a mere child. He was only seventeen when he went to London

to take up journalism, where he seems to have gone through the prescribed career for talented young Irishmen--even to having his tongue loosened in a debating society. Since the first years of his apprenticeship, he has been a frequent contributor to The Daily News, Manchester Guardian, and the London Nation and other publications, besides his regular work for the Royal Exchange Assurance.

His dramatic career began in 1907 with the writing of the one-act piece, The Magnanimous Lover, which, however, was not presented until 1913 after Mixed Marriage had taken the Abbey by storm and established the author's popularity as a playwright. In 1913 Ervine gave up his position with the Royal Exchange Assurance and threw his lot in with the literary renaissance of Ireland. Since then, besides serving for a year as manager of the Abbey and acting for a time as dramatic critic for The Daily Citizen, he has written two slight one-act plays, The Critics and The Orangeman; two long plays of worth, Jane Clegg and John Ferguson; a volume of short stories, Eight O'clock and Other Studies; and four novels, Mrs. Martyn's Man, Alice and a Family, Changing Winds, and Foolish Lovers. Indeed, he seems for the present at least to have abandoned the drama for the novel, and with James Stephens to be trying to write the fiction which somehow Ireland has never produced. But for our present purpose, it is only with Ervine as a dramatist that we are concerned.

So many references have been made to The Magnanimous Lover and Mixed Marriage that no extended discussion of them is necessary here. The former play is, as has been said, one of the best constructed one-act plays in the language, a no less remarkable "first attempt" than The Clancy Name from the standpoint of craftsmanship. The theme is as old as the first injured woman, but the characterization is fresh enough to prevent the action from seeming hackneyed. In all his later work which has received so much acclaim from the press, Ervine has hardly drawn a better character than Maggie Cather, a humble Magda who has fought her bitter way to respect even in a community pervaded by the self-righteousness of Ulster. In her refusal to marry the coward who offers marriage in order "to make a good woman of her" and to rid himself of his fear of eternal punishment, Maggie is not a stereotyped mouthpiece of Woman's demands as she would have been in the hands of a clumsy amateur. She is an individual, an angry scornful woman with Scotch-Irish canniness which makes her reject the man who can say callously that he will treat his child "just as if he were a child of God instead of sin."

Mixed Marriage, the play which won Ervine's popularity, is in some respects the best of all his work. It is long enough to make up an entire evening's program and as Boyd says, "It compresses within four acts all the various ramifications of that religious bigotry which has served politicians more

usefully than it has served Ulster."¹ Structurally the play is typical of all of Ervine's work in its firmness, sense of completeness, tensity of situation, and mastery of a distinctive dialect. There are almost no loose threads in St. John Ervine's dramas. Mrs. Rainey is in many ways the most pleasing creation in the realistic drama of Ireland. She is gentle and wise, tolerant because she "belaves in lavin' people alone." Through-out the play she expostulates with her masterful husband-- "Sure ye'd go on talkin' a life time if A was to let ye;" "We're gettin' ould, John; it dussen become the ould t' be head-strong and onforgivin'." But in the end when the obstinacy she has tried so hard to soften brings tragedy upon the family, she comforts Rainey through her tears, "Aw, my poor man, my poor man."

In this connection one is impelled to quote a bit of criticism which appeared in the Dial a few years ago: "What distinguishes Mr. Ervine from most of the other Irish dramatists is his mastery of his craft and his firm grasp of character. About most of the Irish plays--Mr. Colum's for instance--there is a sort of amateurishness. Mr. Ervine has none of their aimless talkativeness, their vagueness, their tendency to rest content with second rate workmanship. With him every stroke is firm and clear and every stroke tells. You will go far in

1. Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 181.

recent drama before you will find a better drawn character than Mrs. Rainey or her husband."¹ Few readers or theatre-goers familiar with Ervine will question these words.

The two short plays which followed Mixed Marriage appeared in 1913 at the Abbey, where all of Ervine's plays except Jane Clegg were first produced. The Critics is a witty little satire upon the Irish press representatives who had shrilly attacked The Magnanimous Lover for its use of the word "bastard." The scene is set in the entrance of a Dublin theatre where a belated press critic gathers material for his article upon the play being presented. Considerable fun is obtained from the comments he absorbs upon the base immorality of the play, which turns out to be Hamlet. But there is such obvious exaggeration of even a newspaper critic's stupidity (as when the would-be critics decide that Shakespeare must be the Gaelic name of some upstart dramatist recently acquired by the Abbey) that one wishes that Ervine had refrained from this attempt to follow the example of Byron and George Bernard Shaw. Naturally the play has never had any stage success, and even if it is not the "intellectual offence" which Boyd charges, it is in every way unworthy of Ervine, except in the point of structure. Like Robinson, he never slips there.

The Orangeman is the same vein as Mixed Marriage and

1. H. E. Woodbridge: A Group of Irish Plays; Dial, Vol. 61, p. 463.

Purcell's The Enthusiast, a criticism of the bigotry which refuses to see Ulster's own best interests. Here again the characterization is clear. John M'Clurg is a less robust bigot and bully than John Rainey, but is equally headstrong. Here, too, Ervine pins his faith to the young generation, the best of whom refuse to carry the "Ulster drum" or any other symbol of North-Irish intolerance. The play is marred by a lack of the humor which usually appears in Ervine's work, and which so enlivens Purcell's little comedy on the same theme.

Jane Clegg, the next play, has not been discussed at any length because it is really outside the Irish movement, dealing as it does with London life and character, and first presented as it was at a London theatre. Choosing an English locale for the play must have been an experiment with Ervine, for the theme is one so inherent in human nature that there seems no good reason why Irish characters might not have been used as well as Cockney. But as Ervine has developed it, it is English in spirit as well as in the superficial aspects of dialect and scene. It is chiefly interesting to us in the present study for its illustration of Ervine's preoccupation with the working class and of his ability to put in motion a set of characters out of whose natures the dramatic struggle inevitably grows. The intellectual content of the play is important but is never emphasized to the point of overshadowing the emotional conflict. The drama progresses by the process

of boring into the inmost selves of Jane and Henry Clegg. When Jane, with the full extent of Henry's faithlessness before her, says quietly, "You are an absolute rotter," Henry replies: "I don't know. I'm not a bad chap really. I'm just weak. I'd be all right if I had a lot of money and a wife that wasn't better than I am--I ought to have married a woman like myself or a bit worse--I always feel mean here. Yes, I am mean. I know that; but it makes me meaner than I really am to be living with you." There is art in the way the entire psychological problem of moral difference in marriage is handled in Jane Clegg. One of the best criticisms of the play is Ludwig Lewishohn's: "Jane Clegg is not a great play, even though we measure it in terms of depth and intensity rather than range. But it belongs to a great kind."

John Ferguson first appeared in 1915 when for some reason it was practically a failure, although when staged a year later in New York it had a high degree of success almost at once. It is longer and more deeply tragic than any of the other plays--more affected by naturalism. Naturalistic influence shows in the helplessness of the Ferguson family in the chain of catastrophes which come upon them; in Jimmy Caesar's inability to transcend his cowardly nature even when goaded to fury by events; in the irony which brings the money a week too late to save the trouble. On the other hand, the character of the protagonist, his sweetness, and his resignation which

is a resignation coming from strength not weakness, these things make the play stand out in beautiful contrast to the darkly naturalistic plays of the continental school. At the end of the play, with his farm taken from him, his daughter's life ruined, and his only son doomed to the gallows, John Ferguson finds comfort in his religion. The emotional up-fling upon which Aristotle insisted for tragedy is felt in a play which ends with the beautiful old words, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for them. O Absalom, my son--my son!" It is not necessary, surely, to contrast the emotional effect of such words with that of "The sun--the sun--give me the sun, mother," or with the last lines of Strindberg's Father.

Except for the remarks of Jimmy Caesar and of "Clutie" John, the neighborhood vagrant whose presence in the play seems somewhat of an artistic mis-step, John Ferguson is unrelieved by the humor which is evident in most of Ervine's other literary work. And to a thoughtful reader Jimmy is essentially pathetic because he realizes so keenly his lack of strength. The sayings of the half-wit are so much in the minor key that they add rather than detract from the general effect.

E. A. Boyd, Ervine's most savage critic, declares that the characterization of John Ferguson is "crude", "melodramatic," and "purely a mental conception of human types"; that Jimmy Caesar is a monstrous caricature, who utters openly all the

craven thoughts of the meanest-spirited creature conceivable to the average man"; that John Ferguson himself "lacks real life".¹ Granting that Jimmy is exaggerated and that Ferguson may, perhaps, repeat too many Scriptural lines, one must still object to such sweeping disapproval as Boyd's. If the talk of the characters seems exaggerated, it is at least fully borne out by their actions. Never once does Jimmy act in any way inharmonious with his craven utterances; John Ferguson transcends his momentary human weakness after Andrew's confession and behaves according to the exalted character and the simple faith of a man who has grounded his life on the Bible.

Before leaving Ervine's work as a playwright some attention must be given to the caustic criticism he has met at the hands of the writer of Contemporary Drama in Ireland. Boyd certainly cannot be said to show a great deal of love for any of the young playwrights, with the exceptions of Colum and Mayne, whose work is structurally among the weakest in the entire group of realists. But upon Ervine he empties the full violence of his wrath. Charging the Belfast playwright with total lack of the Irish spirit which is to him the touchstone of excellence of Irish drama, he declares: "Whatever their respective merits and demerits, all the writers heretofore mentioned have endeavored, with varying success, it is true, to

1. Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 187.

dramatize those elements of our civilization which are fundamentally and specifically Irish. Some have felt the poetry others the tragedy, some have seen only the humor, others the superficial drama of Ireland--but with negligible exceptions none have written in a mood indifferent or alien, to the spirit of the race. St. John Ervine must be counted amongst those exceptions. He has not divined any vital situation arising out of the character of the Irish people and the composition of Irish society. His presentation of the political conflict in Ulster, a relatively superficial and transitory condition, is the only instance where he has given dramatic expression to a genuine Irish problem..... In fine this dramatist is at bottom a journalist, with an eye for the external peculiarities of Irish life."¹

Even if this attack were in every way justified by the facts, we could not allow the fault indicated to be the serious thing which Boyd believes it. The spirit of it would condemn the work of Ibsen himself, for few of his best dramas try to dramatize the elements of civilizations which are "fundamentally and specifically" Norwegian. But that does not make of him a "journalist." Modern literary art shows a growing tendency to portray the universal of human nature under

1. Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 194.

the "external peculiarities" of region and dialect. A realization of this fact and a sense of the harm which has been done in Ireland by isolating her from the common civilization of other countries leads Joyce to make one of his characters say in The Exiles, "If Ireland is to become a new Ireland, she must first become Europeanized." Ervine is thoroughly in tune with the artistic trend of his age when he attempts to show universal nature in the Irish working people of whom he writes. It is not necessary that art shall be the expression of a "profound or essential phase of national life and being."

Boyd's last statement that Mixed Marriage and The Orangeman are "presentation of the political conflict" is not critically just. Political subjects are "relatively superficial and transitory", it is true, and are never material for the best art. But in the case of these plays the real theme is bigoted intolerance and obstinacy. Surely those are not superficial and transitory phases of human nature. Ervine's work has its blemishes and imperfections, but not those ascribed to it by Boyd. If only the poetry of Yeats's kings and the naivete of Synge's peasants are Irish, Boyd is perhaps right. But if humor and homely imaginativeness, hot tempers and stiff wills are Irish, none of Ervine's Ulster people can be said to lack Celtic flavor. If he has definitely abandoned the drama for the novel, contemporary dramatic art has lost a promising writer.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

In the course of this study we have traced the veering of contemporary Irish drama away from the imaginative drama inaugurated by Yeats and perfected by Synge; the influence of the "drama of ideas" upon the men who began writing just when Synge was leaving off; the development of a new type of peasant who is neither so clod-like and brutal as that of the naturalistic writer of the continent nor so fanciful and extravagant as that of the earlier Irish playwrights; the building up of a conception of Irish life which is not strictly dependent upon province boundaries; and finally, in very brief fashion emphasis has been laid upon the two writers whose work seems most significant and most promising of better things to come. A few words must suffice to round out this discussion of the realistic new Irish drama.

It is true that none of the Irish playwrights of to-day have exhibited the imaginative wealth and artistic skill of great dramatists, although at least two of the group have written plays which if not among the very best of modern dramas are immeasurably superior to the average stage plays. Amateurish and tainted with melodrama though the new Irish drama often is, it never descends to the level of the trash which so often occupies the English and American stage. It is marked

by a simplicity and absence of theatricality which goes back to the Irish "genius for common life". It attempts a dignified, homespun realism which shall show Irish life as it and every other rural life is. It embodies a candid criticism of national life which might play to empty seats in America if made upon American life. It is entirely clean and wholesome in spirit--there is not one suggestive speech in the entire list of plays under discussion.

The criticism of Lloyd Morris seems entirely just and apt: "The younger school refuses to find consolation and refuge either in its dreams or in an heroic past. They are concerned with the problems of to-day in an effort to influence the life of tomorrow. They produce social criticism in order to enforce the changes which they desire Ireland to undergo; if they are extreme in their satire and pessimistic in their tragic conception of life, it is because propaganda must necessarily enforce its point by exaggerating and emphasizing conditions. Their propaganda, however, is not one of art, but of actual experience. What these new playwrights have done is to turn from art to life, and by doing so they have laid the foundations of their art upon a firmer soil."¹

In the trying years of the war dramatic activity in Ireland, like every artistic activity in every land, came almost

1. Celtic Dawn, p. 170.

to a standstill. For a time the Abbey Theatre was closed and the old company of Irish actors was dissipated. From 1915 to 1920 almost no plays of distinction were written or produced in troubled Ireland. But since Lennox Robinson has turned his energies toward restoring the national theatre to its old power, there is every reason to hope that play-writing and play-acting will come back into their own in Ireland.

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